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# A qualitative study of rural community college white faculty (mis)understanding of diversity

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**A qualitative study of rural community college white faculty  
(mis)understanding of diversity**

by

**LaDrina Nicole Wilson**

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:  
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The student author, whose presentation of scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2018

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## **DEDICATION**

This  
dissertation  
is dedicated to my mother  
who taught me the importance of  
knowing my history and inspired me to  
chase all of my dreams.  
Thank you!

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the perceptions of white faculty teaching in rural community college in hopes of identifying how these faculty understand or appreciate the importance of diversity in their institution's commitment and in their classroom. Case study methodology was used to examine the perceptions of six white faculty in one rural institution in the Midwest. Using White Racial Consciousness Model and Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Model as the theoretical underpinning, four themes emerging through the participants' narratives gathered from the data collection and analysis: (1) Feeling Othered; (2) Operationalizing Diversity; (e) Historical and Hypothetical Privilege; and (4) Students as Teacher. Findings suggest there is no shared definition of diversity; however, there is general support of diversity with the exception of one participant who was an outlier. Recommendations are provided for developing an institutional diversity statement as well as other related policies and practices.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“College is still for white people” (Lawrence, 2016, *Salon Magazine*)

“Higher education creates ‘White racial privilege’ ” (Bidwell, 2013, *U.S. News*)

“The achievement gap between White and black students still gaping” (Camera, 2016, *U.S. News*)

### Background of the Study

The aforementioned headlines illustrate how diversity in higher education is often reflected by American media. In an editorial excerpt from his book entitled, *Blackballed: The Black and White politics of race on American campuses*, Ross (2016) pointed to the racial tensions growing on college and university campuses across America. Bidwell (2013) reported on the disproportionate aggregation of white students at selective, highly funded colleges. Camera (2016) further explained the growing achievement gap among black and white students in higher education. These examples illustrating how the media tends to report diversity in higher education laid the groundwork for the need to provide for a broader understanding of diversity that extends beyond racial boundaries in higher education. These articles also illuminate the structural inequity that is often perpetuated in higher education which warrants more than mere attention – actionable solutions.

### Diversity: Social and political implication and the community college

The American community college emerged from its roots in higher education in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Following the industrial revolution, the country experienced an increased need for a more skilled workforce. Community colleges were looked to as an access point to achieving a highly trained workforce and a driving force in achieving social equity (Cohen & Brawer). Since the inception of the community college, access has been a foundational component and perceived to be an

equalizer as it relates to social inequality. Nevertheless, current and historical data do not support this notion as illustrated by the growth of achievement gap (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2015; Wyner, 2014). The achievement gap, which measures the educational performance across racial/ethnic, gender and income, continues to be an issue that plagues the American education system.

The growth of the wealth gap and data that illustrates who actually is likely to not only attend college, but also successfully complete college is increasingly disparate across socioeconomic/class and racial/ethnic lines (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005). Much like at the time of their inception, community colleges are increasingly being looked to as the leader in developing a skilled workforce. In 2009, during the first joint session of Congress, President Barack Obama proclaimed that America would once again be the leader in post-secondary education attainment. Obama noted that this goal would be achieved by the year 2020 if 60% of 25 to 34-year-olds earned at least an associate degree (Fry, 2017). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, the average age of community college attendees is 28 and nearly 49% of attendees are between the ages of 22 and 39 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016). That being said, the success of Goal 2020 relies heavily on the success of nontraditional students, whom the community college is designed to serve.

The Obama administration's focus on completion has played a part in the shifting the narrative in community colleges from access to success and completion. This shift has resulted in re-conceptualizing how community colleges serve students. Bailey et al. (2015) discussed the need to create guided educational pathways and the need to reconsider developmental education from an assessment, curricular and instructional perspective in

community colleges. Developmental education, perceived as an opportunity to make higher education more accessible to individuals who did not meet four-year college or university requirements, particularly in reading, writing and math, has not only become a predictor of lack of completion, but also disproportionately impacted students from diverse backgrounds (Wyner, 2014). Driving home the need for equity, Wyner (2014) noted that in order to increase the number of post-secondary credentials awarded and improve their completion rates, the achievement gap that exists among students of color and their white counterparts must be addressed in order for community colleges to make notable progress toward and increase completion rates. Educational opportunity provided at the community college must now be rooted in access *and* success. The success of all student demographics is needed to move the needle in making America number one in post-secondary attainment; thus, ignoring inequity can no longer continue.

Learning from their four-year counterparts in higher education, one might concede that community colleges could increase the presence of racial diverse faculty members to have a positive impact on campus climate, improve students of color ability to make connections with role models and improve student persistence and success (Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008). Nevertheless, community colleges are not seeing the increase in diverse faculty that would be needed to be at least representative of the student populations they serve (Fujimoto, 2012). As Jackson-Weaver, Baker, Gillespie, Ramos, and Watts (2010) noted, "...lack of institutional diversity and the low number of faculty of color in our colleges and universities is another issue of major concern. There seems to be consensus that this is a problem, but no agreement on how to fix it" (p. 12). Moreover, the obligation for diverse educational experiences does not lie solely on the lived and educational experiences

that the few diverse faculty of color may bring to the classroom. White faculty can employ diversity and diversity concepts in the classroom, and academic freedom gives them the right to exercise to what extent diversity is included in their curriculum and pedagogy. The belief that diversity in all forms is valuable must be an institutional belief. According to Wilson (2013), an institution that considers diversity an important factor in the overall health of their organization demonstrates this through its executive-level leadership (team). Institutions with demonstrated commitment to diversity at the highest level can get its constituents, including faculty, to support and embrace diversity in practice by demonstrating that diversity is the responsibility of everyone.

### **Problem Statement**

At community colleges, faculty have contractual obligations that clearly outline the parameters associated with the scope of their work. While the role of faculty can be clearly defined, the personal responsibility a faculty member feels toward diversity and inclusion in the classroom is often not measured. As noted by Fujimoto (2012), community colleges do not hire faculty of color at the rate in which they employ whites. The lack of inclusive hiring practices does not address existing white faculty's views on their responsibility related to diversity in the classroom.

Diversity can be defined by the differences that exist phenotypically (race, gender, physical ability, first generation students, etc.) to those qualities that are indistinguishable by sight (learning disability, socioeconomic status, religion etc.). Furthermore, a lack of awareness of diversity issues or lack of awareness of personal bias can lead to varied levels of diversity and inclusion in the classroom. As open access institutions, community colleges serve widely diverse student populations. These changes will inevitably impact the

demographics of students served in the post-secondary sector of education, particularly community colleges. One can no longer afford to focus on college entry/access, given that the data have shown access does not equal success. One must consider sources of the problem – beyond the student – to find a remedy for the inequality of outcomes that exist (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). In order to better serve the needs of diverse communities and to prepare students to be global citizen, an examination of white faculty perceptions of diversity in the classroom is necessary. The dearth of research related to community college faculty perceptions of diversity represents a void that needs to be addressed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study applied case study methodology to ascertain perceptions of white faculty regarding diversity in the community college classroom as well as their institution's commitment to diversity. While diversity in higher education has been widely researched from the perspectives of student outcomes, persistence and sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007), limited empirical data exist that pertains specifically to community college faculty perceptions of diversity and community college institutional commitment to diversity. Community college represents the sector of higher education that has experienced the most rapid increase in diversity over the past ten years (National Center Education Statistics [NCSE], 2015). This growth and the projected continued diversification of the community college student warrants attention. As the current researcher, I sought to add to knowledge of the field in the several ways: By examining a rural, more homogeneous community college, this research may bring to light any commonalities and unique diversity perceptions that exist among rural white faculty. More importantly, this study explored white faculty perceptions of their institution's stated versus



demonstrated commitment to diversity as well as its impact on diverse pedagogy. The following questions were used to guide the research to address the perceptions of white faculty regarding diversity:

1. How do white faculty members' backgrounds influence their perception of diversity?
2. How do white faculty in rural community colleges define diversity?
3. How does the institution's commitment to diversity shape faculty perceptions of diversity?
4. How does being a rural community effect white faculty's perception of diversity?
5. How do white faculty in rural institutions perceive diversity in their classroom, in their curriculum and in their pedagogy?

### **Diversity Discourse in Higher Education**

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there were 1.5 million faculty at degree awarding post-secondary institutions in fall 2015. Of those faculty, 51% were full-time faculty. Figure 1 illustrates the disparity in racial/ethnic demographic

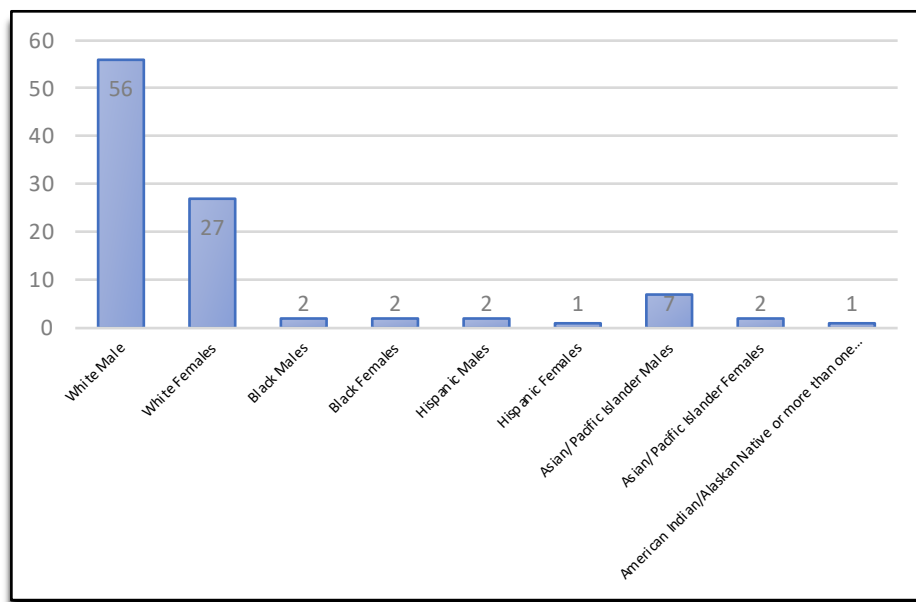


Figure 1. Demographic composition of full-time faculty

representation in full time faculty appointment in higher education. Fifty-six percent of faculty appointments were comprised of white males, 27% were White females, and 7% of appointment were Asian/Pacific Islander men. Black men, black women, and Asian/Pacific Islander women each comprised 2% of appointments followed by Hispanic females at 1% and American Indian/Alaskan Natives and more than one race comprising less than 1%. These data reinforce the opening quotation: “College is still for white people.” Moreover, the narrow focus of diversity measures in the data, supports the presupposition that diversity is often narrowly defined by constructs such as race and gender. These data present gender in the binary form which, in and of itself, presents a challenge when considering gender fluidity. Although used to indicate the lack of diversity of the professoriate, the data exemplify how diversity is often categorically narrowly defined in education.

During the same reporting period, NCES reported 2-year public community college student racial demographics that were drastically different than the faculty populations. White students comprised 51% of the student populations compared to 83% in the faculty segment. Blacks comprised 14% compared to 4% of full-time faculty representation, and Hispanic students comprised 24% of the student demographic, while only having 3% of full-time faculty representation in higher education (NCES, 2015). These data are alarming. The solution to diversifying the professoriate has been elusive and the need to address white faculty perceptions of diversity has become increasingly paramount.

As the student population in community colleges changes, so do the needs of the students who are served. This extends far beyond race and ethnicity. Recent diversity issues on college campus include gender nonconformity and religion. Beemyn (2012) indicated that gender nonconforming and transgender students are more likely to attend community

colleges based on educational and employment practices that are discriminatory based on gender identify prejudice. However, of the 1,167 community colleges in America, only one has a LGBT center (Beemyn). Similarly, the growth of the Islamic faith has resulted in an increase in Muslim students in American colleges and university, yet many campus leaders are unsure of how to address religious diversity on campus (Lipka, 2017). The demands for services to meet the needs of these student populations range from adequate restroom and healthcare accommodations to adequate prayer space and culturally sensitive food options to name the least. These and other diversity issues will be addressed further in the review of current literature. The need for safe space, academically and literally, and the need for inclusive practices is becoming increasingly important in our pluralistic society (Smith, 2015).

Most research has been dedicated to social and emotional needs of diverse student populations, whereas limited attention has been dedicated to pedagogical approaches that address the growing diverse academic needs of diverse populations. Empirical data that have predictive value in determining conditions in which students thrive has been helpful in assisting institutions in supporting in their transition to college. In recent years community colleges have adopted mandatory orientation requirements, mandatory advising and college transition courses to assist in improving student outcome (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2015). However, very few studies have looked at institutional qualities that result in increased student success, particularly for students of the non-dominant culture. The lack of attention to institutional practices that meet the needs of diverse students has resulted in disparaging academic outcomes.

## **Defining diversity**

Defining diversity in higher education can be a challenging effort when attempting to speak to the pluralistic society in which we live (Smith, 2015; Williams & Clowney, 2007). Diversity can be considered from a very simplistic point of view that only addresses the visible characteristics that make individuals different from one another, whereas other definitions can become quite complex and overwhelming in an attempt to be all inclusive. Diversity is hard to define in that it can be as unique as the many individuals who share a classroom. It is generally known that individuals in a classroom are representative of different heritages, experiences, and worldviews. Nevertheless, , a working definition needed to be established to bring a common understanding and contextualize the content of the current study. Diversity is multi-dimensional construct as it relates to faculty identity and pedagogical approaches. Additionally, diversity in this study was considered from a systemic perspective that allowed for an examination of structural inequity and institutional accountability for diverse student outcomes.

An all-encompassing definition of diversity can be elusive, as noted by MacDonald and Bernardo (2005). The rich history of race relations in the United States makes the visible characteristics of diversity much easier to express and address when considering a definition that can be understood universally. Baker et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study that examined how prospective new faculty hires operationalize the definition of diversity. Findings of the study revealed that the legal or Equal Employment Opportunity definition of diversity was most commonly referenced by the applicants. This would make race, ethnicity and gender as central starting points for issues of diversity.

Dialog in higher education related to diversity typically focuses on race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2013). Moreover, these discussions have historically been about challenges associated with achieving diversity via access to higher education (Smith, 2015). In their position paper, MacDonald and Bernado (2005), contended that the oversimplification of diversity can be confining and limit one to characteristics that can easily be placed into a single category. An example of this oversimplification is the gender binary: male or female. A simplistic view of diversity leaves those who do not easily fit into a singular category of race, ethnicity or gender on the margins of diversity discourse. Diversity should be understood as a much more complex construct that does not typically lend itself to single category classifications.

Loden's taxonomy, as cited by Baker et al. (2016), suggested there are primary and secondary dimensions that impact one's sense of self and ultimately sense of belonging. The secondary dimensional components include identities or experiences that are less visible (education, first language, military experience, etc.), but are thought to add to one's values, worldviews and opportunities. Akin to this multi-dimensional identity perspective is the concept of intersectionality. When examining the impact of violence against women of color, Crenshaw (1991) noted that the convergence of two subordinate group memberships has a disparate impact on how women of color experience sexual violence, support and assistance after experiencing sexual or domestic violence, and even sociopolitical alienation. The concepts of intersectionality and recognition of the various dimensions of diversity not only illustrate the complexity that exists in higher education as faculty seek to educate and serve an increasingly diverse student population but also signify how quickly individuals can

feel a sense of isolation if pertinent issues related to religion, age and their other identities are not represented across a student's collegiate experience.

Faculty must consider a less static definition of diversity to meet the needs of community college students. A definition that takes into account the elements of one's identity that can change over time allows for the fluidity needed to be more inclusive. Furthermore, it is important to note that diversity also includes how members of society view others. Diversity, as it relates to identity, is socially constructed and centered on differences. To recognize only those differences that are visible to the eye is superficial and ill-advised (MacDonald & Bernando, 2005). When reviewing a white faculty member's discussion of race in the classroom, Quaye (2012) suggested that "...an alternative concept of diversity is sorely needed-one that shifts from structural race/ethnic diversity to learning from interracial differences" (p. 112). While my study directly addressed the issue of dialog regarding race in the classroom, I contended that defining diversity must extend beyond race and not only address learning from interracial differences but also the multiplicity of identities that exist as students are increasingly aware of the intersections of these identities. Furthermore, a recognition of the power dynamics that exist, particularly from a historical and political context cannot be ignored.

Considering the cited research and the context of the study, the following definition was operationalized for this study: Diversity is defined as the recognition of unique qualities, traits and characteristics that make individuals different from one another. These traits and qualities extend beyond visible characters and include the multiplicity of identities and ideologies that are influential in establishing one's values and belief. Furthermore, in defining diversity I openly acknowledge that individuals whose identities do not conform to

the dominant culture may have experiences that thrust them into a historically subordinate or marginalized group.

### **Operationalizing diversity in a power, privilege, and social justice context**

The functional definition of diversity in this study rejects the notion that diversity and social justice are not mutually exclusive. Diversity, power, privilege and social justice are juxtaposed to emphasize the often-limited discourse that occurs around (in)equity. Power and privilege are words that are viewed as carrying significant weight in a political and emotional context (Smith, 2015). To shy away from these terms would perpetuate the status quo. In higher education, diversity has typically been discussed in a less threatening and celebratory tone that acknowledges multiculturalism, yet avoids equity discourse (Bettez, 2017).

Therefore, diversity in this study is rooted in a social justice context.

It is important to note the significance of such a stance on diversity. While this study is not representative of critical qualitative inquiry because it does not represent or incorporate the voices of a marginalized groups (*Confronting Qualitative Inquiry in Higher Education*, 2012), it was structured to represent a shift from a focus on problematizing diverse student issues to requiring the institution to be considered as a major factor in the community colleges' ability to achieve equitable outcomes. The theoretical framework applied in this study – White Racial Consciousness Model and Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory – are not rooted in critical lens. However, as an African American female, my experiences with diversity support the aforementioned juxtaposition. The model and theory used as the underpinning for this study are discussed in Chapter 2, and my positionality are further addressed in Chapter 3.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The basis for this study was grounded in White Racial Consciousness Model (WRCM) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development. The WRCM addresses the individualistic, yet shared, attitudes possessed by individuals comprised the unit of analysis (white faculty). As white faculty consider the individual perspective on diversity and inclusion, the WRCM provides the context to frame individual identity development. Nevertheless, this model by itself does not adequately encapsulate the totality of diversity. Diversity is a personal and social construct that is uniquely individualized, yet it is environmentally and community informed. Ecology of Human Development Theory addresses the communal aspect of diversity, which was the phenomena of interest. These theories informed the research questions and research protocol, and are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

In addition to thoroughly grounding the researching in theory, a review of current literature on diversity issues in higher education, institutional capacity to response to diversity issues, and white faculty engagement in diversity issues and pedagogy are also explored in Chapter 2. The methodology and methods employed to examine faculty perceptions are presented in Chapter 3, while the findings of research study are presented in Chapter 4. The findings of the research to a broader implication for the deployment of diverse practices by white faculty members are presented in Chapter 5. Finally, the political and emotional issues associated with diversity dialog have impacted me as a researcher. My reflexivity throughout this process was documented in the form of journaling, which served in the development of Chapter 6, an autoethnography.



### **Contribution to Knowledge**

When considering American higher education, there are many foundational elements that have remained unchanged. Faculty have the academic freedom to design an educational experience that not only maintains high academic standards but also supports the needs of diverse students. With the significant over representation of whites in faculty positions, it is difficult to argue that considering white identity and its impact on diversity in the classroom is not of value. According to Cohen and Brawer (2008), American higher education institutions were designed with an aristocratic philosophy, meaning higher education was accessible to affluent/elite white males. Despite the fact that white male student enrollment has been declining across the country due to the change in our country's demographics (NCSE, 2015), white men (and women) still have a stronghold on key roles within higher education, both in the classroom as faculty and in the board room as institutional leaders. With 83% of fulltime faculty in higher education being white, the need to make adjustments in pedagogy based on student needs may not be perceived by faculty. Smith (2015) posited that members of the subordinate culture experience diversity and identity differently than members of the dominant culture. This has often resulted in issues related to diversity being less salient for members of the dominant culture. The fact that white faculty may have been less aware or less understanding regarding members of subordinate cultures, has exacerbated the need to examine their perceptions even more relevant.

Given the current student achievement gap in community colleges, the growing number of diverse students being served and the lack of proportional representation of diverse faculty, it would behoove white community college faculty and community college administrators to support an educational experience that is equitable, diverse and inclusive.

The review of literature has revealed there may be a disconnect between faculty perception of diversity in the classroom and institutional commitment to diversity in community colleges and higher education in general. As colleges seek to improve completion rates and develop students to become global citizens, it is increasingly necessary to promulgate an atmosphere that exposes a diverse student body to a widely diverse curriculum and instruction while openly addressing diversity, privilege and power. The current disparity in educational outcomes has illustrated that current practices are not working, and community colleges need reform that addresses the needs of its diverse student body.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms were defined for use in this study:

***Diverse populations:*** People whose backgrounds are unlike members of the dominant cultures; they may include racial and ethnic minorities, religions, sexual orientation or other characteristics; used interchangeably with diverse backgrounds.

***Ethnicity:*** Relates to shared cultural practices or ways of living; these shared practices may be associated with food, language, music and much more.

***Gender nonconformity:*** Expression of identity that is variant or does not conform to male or female social norms

***Historically underrepresented minorities:*** In higher education, African Americans, Latino/a, and American Indians who have less representation when compared to their share of the population (Smith, 2015).

***Intersectionality:*** Overlapping of social identities and the experience of oppression as a result of the overlapping identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

***LGBTQA:*** Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Allies which refers to the spectrum of sexual orientation, gender non-binary and those who advocate for individuals who identify as members of this community.

***Minority:*** Members of a historically underrepresented group may be used interchangeably with people of color; does not necessarily represent a numeric minority

***Multiculturalism:*** Achieved when more than one group of ethnic, racial, social or religious groups come together yet are able to maintain their own cultural identities. Used interchangeably with pluralism.

***Non-dominant culture:*** Cultures that include language, rituals, values and beliefs that have less power and influence

***Race:*** A group classification based on biological similarities that are socially constructed.

***SES:*** Acronym for socioeconomic status, referring to income levels and class.

***Students of color:*** Students who are African American, Asian American, Latino/a, or American Indian.

***White:*** A socially constructed racial categorization or designation given to those who visibly appear to be Eurocentric or those who visibly appear to have European lineage.

***Whiteness:*** The degrees to which individuals identify with their white racial categorization, and the power and privilege embedded within the white racial classification; associated with being a member of the white race and the variegated cultural, social and ethnic context related to be a white person.

## **CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of white faculty in hopes of identifying how these faculty understand or appreciate the importance of diversity in their institution's commitment and in their classroom. Currently the landscape of higher education lacks diversity in terms of racial and ethnic representation. The professoriate continues to be overwhelming white and male. While institutions have acknowledged the need to improve diverse representation in the professoriate, this remains an elusive goal (Williams & Clowney, 2007). At the same time, the student populations being served continue to become more diverse in race, ethnicity, age and other demographic areas and other identities. The lack of proportionate representation brings to light the need for consideration of how the needs of diverse student populations are being met in the classroom. The dearth of research that examines white faculty perceptions of diversity in the classroom at community colleges needs to be addressed.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were used to guide the research to address the perceptions of white faculty regarding diversity:

1. How do white faculty members' backgrounds influence their perception of diversity?
2. How do white faculty in rural community colleges define diversity?
3. How does the institution's commitment to diversity shape faculty perceptions of diversity?
4. How does being a rural community effect white faculty's perception of diversity?
5. How do white faculty in rural institutions perceive diversity in their classroom, in their curriculum and in their pedagogy?

The literature review focuses on current issues and critiques of diversity in higher education: (a) a review of the impact of exposure to diversity and interactional diversity on student outcomes; (b) a profile of community college faculty, teaching practices that support diversity and inclusion and institutional responses to diversity to provide a rich empirical overview of the state of diversity in higher education; (c) an in-depth analysis of White Racial Consciousness Model (WRCM) to provide the framework for understanding white faculty racialized identity; and (d) Bronfenbrenner Human Ecology Theory to provide the theoretical underpinning to frame the scope of the proposed research. The following databases were utilized to identify peer-reviewed journals articles included EBSCO and ERIC. The following research terms: benefits/advantages, post-secondary, and diversity, many articles were used to provide a glimpse of the current issues associate with supporting or defending diversity. A limitation of the findings was the lack of community college specific discourse as well as an overrepresentation of quantitative studies.

### **Defending and Understanding Diversity in Higher Education**

Because diversity is a complicated concept to understand and even taboo to discuss in certain social circles, it is regarded both positively and negatively (Badly, 2007; Ross, 2014). The need to be politically correct and desire to avoid topics that may reveal conflicting views presents a barrier to open discourse on diversity. The changing demographics of our society and growing understanding of the multiplicity of identities people embody make understanding and defending diversity in higher education a necessity. The role of higher education is to advance our democracy and to develop individuals into critical thinkers who challenge the status quo (Badly, 2007; Smith, 2015). Higher education is also charged with preparing a global citizenry (Smith, 2015). In order to do so, one must understand what

makes us different. However, critics of diversity and multicultural education argue that courses that emphasize or focus on individual identities hinders achieving unity by not emphasizing our commonalities (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). In defending diversity, research supports the cognitive, social, and emotional benefits of students who are exposed to diversity in contact and in coursework. The research outlined as follows examines the impact of diversity by considering the following: quality of diversity exposure, quantity of diversity exposure and in what ways various student populations experience diversity differently.

When reviewing the impact of diversity on cognitive growth, Cole and Zhou (2014), conducted a qualitative study to examine critical thinking gains and which student populations benefited from diversity experiences. Their study sought to identify the benefits of diversity on critical thinking skills for white students and students of color, more specifically Asians and underrepresented minorities. The findings illustrated the aforementioned student populations showed no statistically significant difference in critical thinking outcomes as a result of diversity experiences; however, all populations benefited from interacting with faculty. This finding further emphasized the need to ensure community college faculty have an understanding of diversity to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students to feel as though they can engage with their faculty. Furthermore, regression models showed a different impact for whites compared to ethnic minorities when considering diversity experiences. These findings were consistent with current research that suggests diversity experiences, both in quality and quantity, impact whites and students of color differently (Bowman, 2010; Loes et al., 2012; Ross, 2014).

Loes, Pascarella, and Umbach (2012) delineated their research to consider impact and frequency of diversity on critical thinking to look more specifically at interactional diversity

and diversity courses. This quantitative study looked at how often students engaged in serious dialog with student affairs professionals and students who had different ideology, how often they engaged with individuals of a different race and ethnicity, how often students participated in racial or cultural workshops, how often debates on social or political issues were attended, and much more. The findings suggested that a positive impact on critical thinking outcomes, particularly for white students and the less academically prepared for college as noted by incoming ACT scores. While whites may have more significant critical thinking gains when experiencing interactional diversity and exposure to diverse groups of people, it is important to note that students of color tend to have lower ACT placement scores upon entering college (ACT, 2017). This information supports the fact that interactional diversity can have a positive impact for all students regardless of race or ethnicity. Furthermore, the study examined first year students, which might suggest that over the course of a student's academic experience increased exposure to diversity courses, programs and discourse may have a positive impact on students' critical thinking skills and perspective taking.

Bowman (2010) went one step further and considered the effects of interactional diversity by examining diversity courses and their impact on well-being and appreciation of diversity for students across race and socioeconomic status. The findings revealed that white students and wealthy students who take two or more diversity courses benefit and have greater gains than students of color in terms of comfort with differences, appreciation of diversity, and they reported more frequent contact with diverse populations. Similarly, Ross (2014) examined awareness and tolerance in a diversity course and connected the experience of taking a diversity [course] to a students' belief in coalition building. This study added

depth to the existing research outlined in that it was among the few qualitative studies that focused specifically on black and white women's diversity experiences. The findings revealed that whites believed coalition building was possible at a greater rate than did the black women in the study. Additionally, the top perceived barriers to coalition building were different among the white participants in the study and their black counterparts. White women felt religion, sexuality and other unidentified issues were barriers to coalition building, while black women indicated race as the primary factor. This finding supports research that suggests issues of race are more salient for minorities than for whites. (Smith, 2015).

Connected to critical thinking and coalition building are the concepts of problem solving and civic engagement. Hurtado (2005) examined the relationship of both purposeful and informal cross-cultural interactions at nine universities across the United States. This longitudinal study of 4,403 students looked not only at the frequency of interaction across races, but also examined the quality of these interactions. This is important when considering the historical perspective of diversity in American education. From *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the landmark United States Supreme Court case that desegregated schools across the country to *Grutter vs. Bollinger* (2003), which resulted in upholding affirmative action admissions requirements as constitutional at the University of Michigan Law School, higher education has a history of assuming that access or simply creating an environment where cultures share a space has value; however, Hurtado's study pointed not only to the numerical interactions but also quality and intentionality of interactions. The research showed a positive relationship and positive outcomes in the area of students' analytical problem-solving based on positive interactions with diverse peers.



This finding underscores the importance of faculty considering pedagogical approaches that support having diverse groups of students interact with one another. Furthermore, the students who had positive interactions with diverse peers were more likely to be civically engaged (Hurtado, 2005). The data represented in the number of students who cited positive interactions with diverse peers and participation in state and federal elections. Additionally, these students were less likely to consider themselves as having value differences when considering their diverse peers (Hurtado). This finding directly contradicts critics of diversity in education who claim that diversity emphasizes differences to a fault and further supports the notion the meaningful diversity engagement provides an opportunity for cognitive growth and improved intergroup relations.

This cognitive development and improved intergroup relations do not come without conflict and cognitive dissonance. Ross (2014) noted significant conflict among participants in her study. Two sections of the diversity course ran during the same term: one section met twice per week and the other met once per week. The section that met once per week had early conflict that centered on differences in beliefs related to sexuality and religion. Despite the conflict and differences of beliefs that resulted need in an intervention to improve classroom communication, students reported a better awareness of diversity and an increased tolerance of differences compared to the beginning of the course. Bowman (2010) noted that disequilibrium experienced by college students who are introduced to people or ideas that cause them to confront their previously held beliefs is one key component to students experiencing gains in comfort with differences, appreciation of diversity and increased diversity contact. A key component connected to the disequilibrium that may be experienced is opportunity for resolution. The research of Ross (2014) showed a substantial difference in

the classroom dynamics of the section that met once per week versus the second that met twice per week. These findings support increased frequency in diverse interactions may be needed to resolve the disequilibrium referenced by Bowman (2010).

A key component in Ross's (2014) study revealed that students who experienced conflict in dialog across cultures were slightly less likely to believe in opportunity for coalition building across cultures. This finding was also evident in Hurtado's (2015) examination of negative interactions students encountered across cultures. Negative interactions resulted in lower sense of confidence in personal leadership ability, cultural awareness, concern and support for public issues including race and lesbian, gay, bisexual based efforts (Hurtado, 2015). Both studies by Ross (2014) and Hurtado (2005) illustrated the significance of facilitated diversity discourse in higher education whereby simply creating the space for interaction is not enough. An informed and guided dialog can reduce the opportunity for negative informal interactions. Faculty have the opportunity to facilitate this dialog.

The benefit of diversity in higher education has been supported by numerous scholars (Bowman, 2013; Hurtado, 2015; Smith, 2015). The benefits of interracial and cross-cultural interactions for college students have proven to foster positive outcomes for students of color and their white counterparts. A substantial amount of energy has been dedicated to examining the benefits for interracial interactions in light of the legal outcomes that have upheld and struck down various college admissions policies that consider race in their admissions practices. Community colleges are open-access institutions and typically do not have admissions policies related to entry into the college. Given the open admission process and the wide range of students served at community college, it is particularly important to

note that diversity benefits all student types. In a longitudinal examination of interracial and diversity interactions, Bowman (2013) found a positive relationship between the frequency of interracial interaction and a positive change in students' leadership skills, intellectual engagement, and emotional well-being. Noteworthy was the linear effect and predictive value of emotional well-being as significantly higher for students of color as they experienced an increased frequency of positive interracial interactions. Moreover, there was a higher positive relationship for intellectual engagements for Whites as the frequency of positive interracial interactions increased (Bowman). The data support using the classroom as a space to promote positive interracial interactions to enhance students' self-concept and emotional well-being.

Although *Brown vs. Board of Education* ended segregation in education over sixty years ago, K-12 schools are increasingly segregated (Bowman, 2013). This has created a unique opportunity for colleges and universities to introduce and encourage diversity on campus, since many high school students do not have significant cross-cultural interactions due to segregation. Diversity in presence is important and, as illustrated in the literature, meaningful interactions support the growth and development of college students who either currently or eventually will be contributing to the regional, national, and international workforce as global citizens. Through the promotion of diversity, colleges not only develop more civically engaged global contributors, but also foster improved psychological well-being, leadership skills, and intellectual engagement. scholarly literature supports positive outcomes for students who have cross-cultural interactions while attending college (Engberg & Hurtado, 2011). These outcomes include improved critical thinking skills, increased civic engagement, reduction of bias and positive academic performance (Hurtado, 2005; Loes,

Pascarella, & Umbach, 2012). Campus climate is shaped by the experiences of students and faculty inside and outside the classroom. The overall climate of an institution can impact not only the public perception of an institute but also more specifically student outcomes. Faculty can play a significant role in creating a chilly campus climate if they are not attuned to diversity in the classroom.

Much of the current literature on campus climate examines the outcomes and experiences of students. This limited view does not take into consideration whether or not the perceptions and experiences of students align with the perceptions and experiences of professors. Boysen, Vogel, Cope, and Hubbard (2009) studied the relationship between students, faculty and teaching graduate assistants (GA) perceptions of bias in the classroom. Their findings suggested that faculty notice more overt bias in the form of stereotypes more than GAs and students, while subtle bias was reported at a higher rate by students than GAs and faculty. Consequently, the study indicated that subtle bias was reported at a lower rate by GAs and faculty because students identified GAs and faculty as the more frequent perpetrator of subtle bias or microaggression (Boysen et al., 2009). Unsurprisingly, GAs and faculty also reported successful interventions upon noticing bias at a much higher rate than undergraduate students. This disconnect between student, GA, and faculty perceptions of appropriate responses can have a significant impact on the student experience. When biases are not addressed and racial, ethnic, and gender issues are ignored by faculty, students are forced to manage academic and discriminatory stressors. Furthermore, Boysen and colleagues (2009) noted that interventions described by students, faculty, and GAs included ignoring biases that are experienced in the academic setting. Interventions that include

faculty ignoring bias or diversity dialog can have a significant impact on students from diverse backgrounds.

## **Rurality**

Rural communities have multidimensional attributes that aid in defining rurality. Anderson (2017) noted the rurality ranges in definition from the more technical definitions established by the U.S. Census Bureau to the image-based considerations that are set by those who have preconceived notions about individuals from rural areas. These definitions range from population statistics to geographic isolation, homogeneity, and local identity (Anderson, 2017; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). The U.S. Census Bureau has defined rural as a location with a population of fewer than 2,500 people. However, there are common characteristics beyond their population statistics that make rural communities worthy of further research, and these characteristics have implications for community colleges. The study of diversity and inclusion in rural communities is important because "...some ways of thinking about rurality fail to capture the complex and unique realities of rural regions" (Brann-Barrett, 2015, p. 761).

According to Greenblatt (2017), some rural communities are thriving while hundreds of other rural communities struggle with high levels of unemployment, poverty, suicide, drug addiction, and young people migrating out for better career opportunities in metropolitan areas. Rural communities are experiencing declining populations and can attribute their poor economic advancement to the low education attainment rates, consolidation of farms, and overreliance on single industries for the majority of their employment opportunities (Greenblatt). Industries that are prevalent and often the economic backbone of rural communities are as follows: agriculture, mining, construction and landscaping, assembly or

manufacturing, and food or meat processing plants (Koricich, Chen, & Hughes; 2018; Sierk, 2017). The phenomenon of out-migration is problematic to the local identity of many rural communities. Often young people are leaving to pursue opportunities they lack in their hometowns, resulting in the perception of failure for those who chose to stay in the community (San Antonio, 2016).

Despite being characterized as homogeneous, approximately 20% of rural residents are Native American, African American, or nonwhite Hispanics (Greenblatt, 2017). The Hispanic population has surged in rural communities over the last three decades, outpacing the non-Hispanic population growth rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), the Hispanic population growth increased in rural communities by 45% from 2000-2010, as compared to the non-Hispanic population growth of 2% during the same period. As rural communities become more diverse, it is important to note that minority groups in rural communities often face higher levels of poverty. Additionally, immigrants and refugees increasingly inhabit rural communities and comprise some of the most vulnerable sectors of the labor market (Koricich et al., 2018). Despite the growing representation of minorities and agriculture's significant role in the economic viability of many rural communities, "African Americans own less than 1 percent of land while Latinos own less than 2 percent" (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015, p. 21).

Sierk (2017) and Anderson (2017) noted that the idea of rurality evokes certain images that are now being challenged by the diversification of rural areas. These images are often associated with a simplistic, rustic, agricultural lifestyle that suggests a certain nostalgic sentiment (Sierk, 2017). This imagery is challenged even further when considering the argument for multifunctionality of rural geography versus the commercialization of rural

landscapes for economic viability (Bascom, 2001; McCarthy, 2005). Multifunctionality calls for the preservation of rural geography (McCarthy, 2005). This preservation creates a working landscape that moves beyond the high intensity production of a single commodity (i.e., corn, soy beans, etc.). In and of itself, multifunctionality can preserve rural geography and the species and wildlife that have thrived in the rural habitat; however, this approach has serious economic implications for commodity producers and can be controversial in rural communities (McCarthy, 2005). Potter and Burney (2002) argued that protection of rural spaces supports sustainability, biodiversity and creates diverse employment opportunities. Similarly, when examining the case of Branson, Missouri, Bascom (2001) suggested that the commercialization of rural spaces can drive consumer consumption and increase the value of rural land. The argument for rural geography utilization is often an economic one given the declining economic forecast for rural communities in the United States. Nevertheless, Sierk (2017) contended the idyllic characteristics of rural spaces over time have been racialized and the definition of rural and urban have been coded to mean “white” and “not-white”, respectively. The growing diversification of rural communities’ conflicts with the racialized terms.

This diversification extends beyond racial and ethnicity. The growth of sustainable and alternative farming practices has transformed the role of women in many rural farm communities (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). The increase of women as farm operators has not led to full gender equity when considering the division of labor on farms (Pilegeram & Amos); nevertheless, the changing landscape of farming causes one to confront the stereotypes associated with rurality. The increased representation of women in farming is, in part, associated with the changes in access to educational and economic opportunities. This

increased access to land and farm ownership has largely benefit well-educated white women (Pilegram & Amos). Nevertheless, this diversification is worth consideration given its incongruity with the historical narrative of rural communities.

### **White, whiteness, and the colorblind**

There is substantial research related to white identity and critical white studies (Croll, 2007; Jacobson, 1998; Roediger, 2007; Rowe et al., 1994). While critical white studies do not form the theoretical framework for this study, it should not go without mention. For the purpose of this study, white has been defined by the researcher as a socially constructed racial categorization or designation given to those who visibly appear to be Eurocentric or those who visibly appear to have European lineage. Given the nature of this definition, it is worth noting that this definition is subjective in nature. The reliance on visible attributes can lead to presumptions about individuals' racial background and inevitable will lead to incorrect classifications. While this working definition provides a shared context, it is important to note that American cultural has a rich history of "...instability of race as both an idiom of power and a category of perceptions" (Jacobson, 1998, p. 140). It is the physiognomic perceptions that have led to synonymous use of the terms white and Caucasian, essentially diminishing the significance of ethnicity over time and making the white race a conglomerate of Jews, Hebrews, Anglo-Saxons, and many other ethnicities (Roediger, 2007). The white definition was developed, in part, to acknowledge skin visible differences of the white race and minorities groups. The appearance of being white can result in a having different experience than those who appear to be people of color, regardless of whether the white racial designation is accurately assigned. For the purpose of this study, the experience of being white is best understood in the context of whiteness. Whiteness



considers the power and privilege that accompanies the physical attribute of being white (Grover, 1996). Furthermore, whiteness acknowledges the variegated cultural, social and ethnic context related to be a white person.

Roediger (2007) addressed the historical context of what it means to be white when describing the evolution of various ethnic immigrant groups entering the United States during the industrial revolution. From a historical perspective, ethnic groups within the white race dominated the hierarchy of social class. Although whites, regardless of ethnicity, were positioned as superior to minorities groups, ethnic background played significant role in defining the working class in the late nineteenth century (Roediger). The United States has had a history of political, social and economic confrontations that, in large part, center on acquiring control, land, and power (Jacobson, 1998). Jacobson noted that conflicts were often defined in terms of superiority based on race (whites over nonwhites), moral authority (white European Christians over nonwhite religious others), and access to the free world (white rulers over savage Native Americans and Mexicans). This whiteness, or dominance, has been woven into the fabric of American culture.

Critical white studies have suggested the privilege embedded in whiteness goes unnoticed by the whites who benefit from the privilege (Jacobson, 1998). The degree of awareness one has of their whiteness undergirds the theoretical construct of this study, which includes the White Racial Consciousness Model. Lack of understanding of the power dynamic associated with whiteness and the broad categorical representations of whites, which has limited emphasis on ethnicity, has allowed for race to be externalized for whites (Flagg, 1995). Whites, consciously or unconsciously, view whiteness as neutral, normative or transparent (Flagg, 1993). This colorblindness or lack of racial awareness has resulted in

perpetuation of the whites' perceived dominant cultural norms. Colorblindness is often associated with a political correctness where whites acknowledge they do not see color or race; therefore, colorblindness implies that all people regardless of color are treated that same. However, critical white studies would suggest that colorblindness disregards the saliency or race for people of color and ignores the power and oppressive nature of whiteness (Flagg, 1993).

### **Rural community colleges**

According to the 2010 Census, 19.3% or just over 59 million individuals live in areas classified as rural. According to the Census Bureau, rural has been defined as anything outside of a metropolitan or micropolitan area. Metro and micropolitan areas are comprised of areas with populations of 50,000 people or more (urbanized area) or areas between 10,000, but less than 50,000 people (urban clusters). While the definition of urban has changed since the Census first began defining and tracking urban statistics, the definition of rural continues to be defined as any population, land or housing outside of urban boundaries. According to Cedja (2010), 57% of community colleges are marked as rural serving, and 42% of full-time faculty appointments are at rural serving institutions.

The Carnegie Classifications adopted a new measure in 2005 to disaggregate rural community colleges from urban and suburban community colleges (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). The majority of rural community colleges are situated in the southern and north central accrediting regions (Hardy & Katsinas). In 2007, nearly 72% of rural community colleges were in these two accrediting regions.

One of the characteristics of rural community colleges, when compared to urban and suburban community colleges, is the lower enrollment of students. When rural communities

have a less skilled labor market, higher tech industries choose not to locate in rural communities with an underprepared work force. This has resulted in lower skilled occupations persisting, lessening the demand for post-secondary education (Korichich et al., 2018).

In the rural community college category approximately 49% of students are enrolled in a large rural community college district, 44% are enrolled in medium rural community college, and approximately 7% are enrolled in small rural community college. According to Hardy and Katsinas (2007), the mean campus enrollment for small urban and suburban community colleges (7,591 students) was greater than the mean campus enrollment for large rural community colleges (7,233 students).

Rural community colleges are faced with many challenges that include lower educational attainment rates, high poverty rates, low economic growth, lower per capita income growth, and funding inequity (Cedja, 2010; Pennington, Williams & Karvonen, 2006). Community colleges are increasingly concerned with funding, especially rural community colleges. As the cost of tuition increases across the country and federal, state and local revenue decrease, rural community colleges experience a disproportionate impact of decreased funding. The decrease in funding affects rural faculty salaries and often results in rural institutions lacking the ability to recruit and retain faculty (Glover, Simpson, & Waller, 2009). This is contrary to Eddy's (2007) assertion that rural communities provide a natural setting that is free of metropolitan area issues such as affordable housing or long commutes, which assist in attracting and retaining rural faculty.

The migration of young people to urban areas results in a strain on the local economy in rural communities. Local officials are often placed in a bind as they consider whether or

not they should invest in education and training to develop a skilled workforce to attract employers or seek companies to come to rural communities that then attract skilled workers to grow their economy (Greenblatt, 2017). For communities that choose the former, the community college essentially trains residents to do jobs that do not exist in their community (San Antonio, 2016). This potentially exacerbates the migration dilemma.

Rural community colleges are charged with serving the educational needs of a large geographic areas that is not densely populated (Pennington et al., 2006). “In areas with limited cultural, social, and recreational services, rural community colleges may be the only source of cultural avocation and personal enrichment in the region” (Pennington et al., 2006, p. 642). Furthermore, as the vitality of rural communities are challenged, community colleges in these areas are looked to as leaders of community change and growth (Miller & Deggs, 2012). Miller and Deggs contended that rural community colleges are uniquely positioned to shape the attitude and behaviors of the citizens in their communities. Because of the geographic isolation of rural residents, community colleges are a valuable resource in these communities and their significance cannot be understated.

### **Community college faculty**

Park, Braxton, and Lyken-Segosebe (2015) identified three types of community college faculty scholars: Immersed Scholars, Scholars of Dissemination, and Scholars of Pedagogical Practice. Immersed Scholars are characterized as demonstrating scholarship of discovery scholarship of integration, scholarship of application and scholarship of teaching (Park et al.). Community college faculty are distinguished from their four-year college/university counterparts for their focus on teaching and learning or scholarship of teaching. Professors from four-year colleges and universities tend to focus more on research

(Townsend & Twombly, 2007). With the focus on teaching and learning in the community college, the teaching style of community college faculty become a point of interest.

Teaching style, or pedagogy, becomes particularly important when considering inclusive classroom practices, such as universal design (Lombardi & Murray, 2011).

According to Glover et al. (2009), the rural community college faculty experience entails non-instructional duties attributed, in part, to the limited number of staff. As resources become more restricted, an increase in responsibility for rural community colleges faculty is likely. Additionally, Murray (2007) noted that many rural community college faculty find the transition into rural communities challenging because of their lack of cultural amenities and the disparity salary when compared to urban and suburban community colleges. Because rural community colleges may be geographically isolated, online instruction can an important modality for rural students and rural faculty when considering instructional delivery methods. As rural communities' access to quality internet service providers increases, distance education may affect the rural community college instructor's teaching practices (Barret, Bower, & Donovan, 2007; Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008;).

Another significant factor that contributes to the experience of community college faculty is the ongoing debate of community college teaching as a profession (Kim, Twombly, & Wolf-Wendel, 2008; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Community college faculty are often compared to their four-year university counterparts (Kim et al., 2008). Some even compare community college faculty to high school instructors. The debate regarding the professionalization of community college faculty is also associated with status.

Researchers have set standards in assessing the professionalization of community college faculty (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Palmer, 1992). These standards include faculty

control over who their students are, how many students they teach and connection to professional resources (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). As more community colleges take on the responsibility of supporting a business model that includes revenue generation and consideration of their bottom line, the role of community college faculty has changed (Kim et al., 2008). Scholars have conflicting views on the amount of control faculty have in their work. Unionization and shared governance have enabled faculty to participate or influence decision making within their organization (Kim et al., 2008), while others have posited that this participation is only to advance the agenda of management to improve productivity (Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2006). In regard to supporting faculty, Eddy (2007) found that "...faculty development leaders believed that they were not currently offering programming at the level they felt they should" (p. 74). Nevertheless, full-time community college faculty who participated in union membership reported having a high degree of satisfaction with their instructional autonomy; however, they reported less satisfaction than nonunion faculty. In addition, full-time faculty who belonged to unions reported more satisfaction with salary and benefits than did nonunion members (Kim et al., 2008). It is unclear to what degree unions and shared governance actually impact academic freedom in terms of classroom content and instructional methods; however, Kim et al. (2008) noted that belonging to a union was a negative predictor of perceived instructional autonomy.

### **Community college institutional responses to diversity**

Regarding community college excellence, Roueche, Roueche, and Ely (2001) conducted a qualitative study in which they referenced Community College of Denver's (CCD) efforts to even the playing field in developmental education. Although much of the campus was comprised of inner-city, lower socioeconomic students who were largely

minorities, they celebrated diversity and acknowledged the challenges it may present (Roueche et al., 2001). As noted by Smith (2015), "...changing demographics and the need for improvements in the educational system and suggesting that the future health and well-being of society will rest on access and success" (p. 210) and it appeared CCD was committed to focus on success for all student demographics. Roueche et al. (2001) noted that CCD is the only higher education institution in Denver that lacks campus composition that includes an ethnic or racial majority; nevertheless, they are committed to acting as an institution that provides students, staff and faculty an understanding of global awareness and cultural pluralism.

The qualitative study by Roueche et al. (2001) revealed that CCD proclaimed themselves as an equal opportunity college as evidenced by three key benchmarks measuring minority student outcomes: (1) 1991 became marked as the first year students of color experienced higher transfer rates than their white counterparts; (2) 1998 marked the first year that cohorts that are tracked had no significant difference in race, gender, age and ethnic group student success outcomes; and (3) 1999 marked the first time minority groups who graduated and transferred surpassed 50%. This institution's outcomes are exponential when one considers the variety of challenges experienced by students of various member groups who were not only disproportionately low socioeconomic but also in developmental education courses. Developmental education placement, by itself, is typically an indicator of one's likelihood of not completing an Associate Degree or program of study (Wyner, 2014).

As noted, CCD's commitment to diversity was demonstrated in its desire to even the playing field. In doing so, they spent ten years creating a culture that values diversity (Roueche et al., 2001). This priority was established on building student self-esteem, which

impacted retention and student success. These findings are congruent with Bowman's (2013) regarding the correlation of emotional well-being of students of color and their positive interracial interactions. CCD was intentional about their commitment to diverse in their approach to student success. Their commitment to diversity was demonstrated in their "...statements of philosophy, cultural pluralism, and shared values for teaching excellence" (Roueche et al., 2001, p. 535). The results indicated students talked openly about how faculty, tutors and mentors cared and took a real interest in them (Roueche et al.). This qualitative study provided a definitive statement that institutional commitment to diversity can result in equitable outcomes when the commitment is both stated and demonstrated.

Developing the pluralistic skills needed for college students thrive in an increasing interdependent and diverse global economy continues to be a goal of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. Higher education institutions are increasingly engaging in strategy understand the effects of diversity initiatives. "Linking research with practice (and focusing research *on* practice) not only provides evidence for the educational rationale supporting institutional diversity initiatives, but makes them central to the goals of undergraduate education" (Engberg & Hurtado, 2011, p. 417).

Engberg and Hurtado (2011) conducted a qualitative study to examine the impact of participation in diversity courses and college sponsored co-curricular activity on student outcomes related to pluralistic skills and intergroup relations among Whites, Blacks, Asians and Latinos. This longitudinal study examined four-year college students' pluralistic skills orientation over the first two years of college, making the finding somewhat pertinent to two-year colleges based on the time community colleges have access to students on their educational path. The direct effect of pluralist orientation was measured by examining



institutionally supported diversity curriculum and co-curricular activity and positive and negative interactions across race (Engberg & Hurtado). The indirect measures were intergroup learning and intergroup anxiety measures (Engberg & Hurtado). The results suggested that Latino students had statistically significant direct effect of diversity courses in their pluralistic orientation and White students experienced a statistically significant direct impact on pluralistic orientation from participation in co-curricular experience (Engberg & Hurtado). With the exception of Latinos, all racial groups experienced statistically significant positive indirect intergroup learning through curricular and co-curricular institutionally provided programming (Engberg & Hurtado). Similar to the previous finding associated with positive student outcomes (critical thinking skills, civic engagement, etc.), the finding of Engberg and Hurtado's study explicitly outlined the significant role of institutional strategy plays in impacting positive outcomes. When left to chance interactions, students are more likely to experience anxiety across racial lines, which could impact their pluralistic orientation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The basis for the current study was grounded in White Racial Consciousness Model (WRCM) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Human Development (ETHD). Following is a review and critique of each of these theoretical frameworks and their application to the experience of white rural faculty in community colleges and their perceptions of diversity.

#### **White Racial Consciousness Model**

In response to Helm's White Racial Identity Theory limitations, Rowe, Bennet, and Atkinson (1994) developed a model that explains how white people consider themselves in

relation to people of color or those they consider to be outside of their racial group. White Racial Identity examined stages of development rooted in the work of Piaget and assumed the course of development is toward a nonracist outcome. WRCM looks less at identity and more specifically at awareness and shared attitudes of Whites, especially as they related to members of a group they consider “others”. These shared attitude types are categorized into unachieved and achieved status (LaFleur et al., 2002; Rowe et al., 1994) and will be discussed greater detail later in this chapter. WRCM rejects the notion that Whites experience racial identity in the same fashion as members of the non-dominant racial and ethnic groups (Rowe et al., 1994). This divergence from previous theoretical frameworks is upheld by the supposition that whites in the United States are not seen as racially distinctive (Flagg, 1993); therefore, white identity development does not start or end in a place of subordination as with other races or ethnicities. In effect, whites have the privilege as members of the dominant culture to “...not think about whiteness, or think about norms, behaviors, experiences or perspectives that are white-specific” (Flagg, 1993, p. 957). Flagg (1993) referred to the privilege that white people have of not having to consider their whiteness as transparency. Flagg also posited that this transparency perpetuates white ideology and white supremacy and is often innocently thought of as colorblindness by well-intended whites. This result also aligns with Smith’s finding that race is more salient for members of the non-dominant cultures (2015).

While the emphasis of this theory is on white consciousness related to other races and ethnicities, my contention was that this theoretical construct is both appropriate and fitting for this study because it provided a framework to better understand white faculties’ classroom interactions as they relate to non-dominant races, ethnicities, and cultures that do

not conform to the white norms. The focus of WRCM centers on attitudes and posits that a correlation between behavior, attitude, and affect exist and through “these observable phenomena that a person’s type of racial consciousness can be inferred” (Rowe et al., 1994, p. 134). Following is a detailed description of the status types and attitudinal types attributed to each status.

As previously noted, there are two status types associated with WRCM: unachieved and achieved. Each status has specific categorical attitude types associated with its respective status. It is important to understand that these attitude types are not fixed and, through experiential situations, individuals can move from one attitude type to another. It is through dissonance that individuals move from unachieved to achieved statuses (Rowe et al., 1994).

### **Unachieved status**

There are three attitudinal types within the unachieved status: avoidant, dependent, and dissonant. An explanation of each is provided hereafter. Avoidant attitudes tend to diminish or minimize the significant of race related issues (Rowe et al., 1994). Characterized by personal anxiety associated with race related matters or ignoring or denying the existence of problematic issues associated with race, individuals who are avoidant feel little or no personal meaning associated with race until life experience brings dissonance. In addition to lacking recognition of problematic race issues, they also lack awareness of their White identity (Rowe et al.). Of considerable interest and what may be ascertained from this study will be the defining moments that influence movement toward consciousness of one’s whiteness in their personal life or in the classroom. Additional insight may be gleaned from

how this consciousness may or may not influence pedagogical approaches toward diversity and inclusion.

The next attitude type in the unachieved status category is the dependent type. Dependent attitude types are determined by individuals of significant influence in the person's life. Differing from the avoidant type in that they have committed to some set of belief or attitude regarding race, the dependent type has not personally reflected on alternative perspectives. Consequently, the beliefs and attitudes of these individuals mirror those of significant others and dominant family members (Rowe et al., 1994). In this way, WRCM converges with Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory (EHDT) in that Rowe et al. acknowledged the strong effect of environmental socialization in shaping attitudes and beliefs. The intersection of these theories will be further discussed in the examination of EHDT; however, it is important to note the role socialization plays on establishing perceptions.

The third and final attitudinal type in the unachieved status is dissonant. The dissonant attitude lacks commitment and illustrates uncertainty related to racial issues (Rowe et al., 1994). Dissonance is experienced when attitudes toward racial and minority group issues are contrary or in conflict with existing beliefs or experiential circumstances. "The disparity between experience and racial attitudes might result in the lessening of commitment to current attitudes and an increased search for information on which to base one's future attitudes" (Rowe et al., p. 137). Individuals who encounter situations and circumstances where stereotypes are challenged or substantiated may find themselves in a dissonant attitudinal category; however, unless the circumstance is traumatic in nature, it would likely

take multiple confrontations where beliefs are challenged to move a person from dissonance toward an achieved status and an attitudinal type associated with the achieved status.

### **Achieved status**

There are four attitudinal types with the achieved status: dominative, conflictive, reactive, and integrative. These attitudinal types display a range of pro-white behavior to hypervigilance toward racial and ethnic issues. Dominative attitudes are implicitly or explicitly pro-white attitudes that embody supremacy over other cultures. These attitudinal types tend to see little similarity between themselves and non-dominant cultures. Furthermore, they tend to discount the evidence of historical inequity that has resulted in lower educational and economical outcomes for non-dominant cultures. Additionally, they view these outcomes as evidence of inferiority of those from a visibly different racial or ethnic group (Rowe et al., 1994).

Groups affiliated with the dominative attitude include members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Alt-Right Movement, White Nationalist or those who explicitly discriminate against minority groups. However, there are more passive modes of expression that constitute dominative attitudes (Rowe et al., 1994). This could entail an unwillingness or reluctance to interact with non-white groups. Individuals who embody a dominative attitude may not see themselves as racist and may simply see whiteness as the norm and other racial groups as inferior (Rowe et al.).

Conflictive attitudes are strongly rooted in individualism; however, fairness is explicitly important. Whites who espouse conflictive belief typically feel that historical legal action that has been taken to grant equal rights result in fair and equitable outcomes. Moreover, they feel that any additional action taken such as affirmation action or other

programs designed to encourage equitable outcomes for members of non-dominant cultures are unnecessary and would result in a disadvantage for whites. “Although many of the blatant structural forms of inequity, such as legal racial segregation, no longer exist in the United States, few would posit that the ideal of a pluralistic democracy has been attained” (Smith, 2015, p. 8). Nevertheless, whites with conflictive attitudes might suggest that legislative action taken to date has allowed for equitable outcomes. Individuals with this attitudinal type would view inequity of outcomes in education, socioeconomic status, health and the like to lack of motivation, lack of resilience or lack of personal achievement on the part of minorities as individuals.

Reactive attitudes have distinct and empathic pro-minority beliefs (Rowe et al., 1994). Individuals in this group may harbor anger, guilt or shame associated with the inequitable acts of other whites. Additionally, they may see themselves as identifying with racial and ethnic minorities to the extent that one might feel he or she has something in common with these groups. This group is characterized as trying to identify with minority groups while rejecting the majority culture. They may hold beliefs that white Americans benefit from and perpetuate discrimination (Rowe et al.). Rowe et al. described a passive-active continuum that might include passive expressions such as a desire to educate one’s self on racial/ethnic issues as to become knowledgeable when speaking with whites or minorities extending to active expression that over-identifying with minorities and ignores individual responsibility of minorities when deviant behaviors occur-blaming oppression and social adaptation.

Integrative attitudes have positive and sensible racial views as a matter of practice. WRCM assumes that attitudes related to white consciousness are formed and attitudinal beliefs shift and change as individuals encounter events, circumstance, and situations that are incongruent with their previous held beliefs. It is through vicarious and first-hand experiential situations that create questions and create the space for cognitive dissonance, which effects attitudes and causes whites to challenge previous held beliefs (Patton et al., 2016).

### **Critique of White Racial Consciousness Model**

A limitation of using this model is the explicit focus on whites and how they see themselves as it relates to people from other races. The model does not take into account the multiplicity of identities that individuals' embody, but rather focuses on cross-racial interaction to develop identity; however, it is an appropriate model to use for this study as the racial identity of white is representative of the dominant culture perspective and their overrepresentation in the professoriate also supports focus on white identity as a theoretical underpinning. Finally, within the bounds of the case study methodology are faculty who identify as white. While there may be other diverse characteristics these faculty embody, central to this study is their whiteness. With this in mind, a theory that examines the various attitudes associated with a characteristic that creates a boundary of this study serves as a justification for WRCM utilization.

The criticisms of WRCM center on the typology used to describe white racial attitudes and its lack of structured stages associated with identity theory (LaFleur, Rowe, & Leach, 2002). Using the Oklahoma Racial Attitude Scale Preliminary Form (ORAS-P), LaFleur et al. revealed a positive correlation between the Dominative (D) and Integrative (I)

types within the achieved status. Additionally, there was a high positive correlation between the Conflictive (C) and Reactive (R) types, suggesting that the theoretical construct may be describing constructs that are in fact two typologies versus four typologies. The breaking down of these items into four constructs instead of two does not actually justify four different attitudes, rather D/I and C/R are describing two unique attitudes and Rowe et al.'s four constructs ascribing to what degree these typologies are expressed and are not actually individual constructs. In essence, by expanding the attitudinal types, WRCM provides insight into identity form by describing to what extent and attitude is expressed. Croll (2007) would characterize the Dominative and Integrative types and the Conflictive and Reactive types as highly identified whites who adopt prideful defensive identities and power conscious progressive identities, respectively. All other whites would be considered weakly identified, which would correspond with WRCM's unachieved status. LaFleur et al. (2002) found a conflicting example of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis run based on the White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (WRIAS) and ORAS-P that both support and reject the reconceptualization of WRCM.

Finally, as with many racial identity theories, WRCM's focuses on white identification in the context of individuals understanding their whiteness as it relates to people of color. The theory does not focus on white identity independent of other racial or ethnic groups. Stated another way, white identity is addressed in the context of outgroup dynamics versus how in-group identification may impact identity development and intergroup dynamics. According to Knowles (2005), "...little research has focused on Whites' experience of their own racial identity, independent of their views about particular outgroups" (p. 238). WRCM's focus on racial identity based on outgroup dynamics



represents only one approach to identity development, which ignores the impact of in-group identification. The concept of in-group identification is important to establishing centrality of white identity. However, using the White Identity Centrality Implicit Association Test, Knowles revealed the more exposure whites have with other racial and ethnic groups, the more implicit or aware, they become of their whiteness. These findings support WRCM's focus on identity development using outgroups. Moreover, Knowles' findings underscore the significance of this study. As faculty encounter an increasingly more diverse classroom, understanding how their racial self-awareness impacts their pedagogical approaches becomes increasingly more relevant. Although there may be scholarly debate regarding the structure of WRCM, the original theoretical concept will be most useful to this study as it provides for more opportunity for observed behaviors to be interpreted and categorized more precisely due to the delineation that exists in the original theoretical concept.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory**

The experience of diversity does not happen in isolation. As noted in the review of literature, engaging in diversity activities, personal cultural, ethnic and racial identity, and exposure to world travel help to shape how faculty engage in diversity in the classroom. With this in mind, it becomes evident that the broader sense of community and human interaction shapes how individuals engage in specific environments. Furthermore, consideration of to what extent the environment impacts the human organism is relevant as well.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory provided the theoretical framework that underscored the significance of this study by offering a construct that considers the environmental systems impact on overall growth and development. According

to *Merriam-Webster collegiate dictionary online* (2017), ecology in its scientific sense refers to how organism interact in their environment. It is with this understanding that Bronfenbrenner (1994) developed the five social systems outlined in his theory: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. A brief description of these systems provides the context of how the combination Ecology of Human Development Theory and WRCM guided this research.

### **Microsystem**

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), microsystem refers to institutions that most readily impact the individual such as family, religious institution and other systems that form a collective unit. At the center of this collective unit is the individual and the many identities they possess. “A microsystem is the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). Nestled within the other ecological systems, the microsystem situates a person in their place and role. To this extent, the microsystem provides an explanation as to how individuals behaviors may shift when considering their various roles and setting. How a faculty member interacts with her partner in the confines of their home are likely to differ from how she interacts with her students in her class. The microsystem situates a person in a setting and acknowledging how the role associated with the setting influences relations. Nested within the three other systems, the microsystem is most certainly applicable to the faculty-classroom environment. Alone the microsystem does not fully address the complexity of the identity expression or identity consciousness of human organism. The emphasis of this study is both on the role of faculty and the identity consciousness associated with their whiteness. The synthesis of WRCM and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecology of Human Development Theory is

necessary to fully encapsulate the how white faculty perceive, experience, and address diversity in the classroom setting.

### **Mesosystem**

Mesosystem considers how the various institutions that comprise the microsystem interact with one another and how these interactions influence the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The interactions between the various roles and various settings can have a joint effect on how individuals develop (Bronfenbrenner). In the ecology model, the mesosystem considers relations between settings and considers the interdependencies of the settings. It may not always be clear which setting is most influential; however, the joint effect is assumed to have more impact than either setting or role if considered independently. In relations to understanding white faculty perceptions of diversity, the microsystems that interact to inform attitudes or influence the understanding of diversity may cause faculty to have personal views that are incongruent with the values of the workplace. The degree to which faculty attend to their personal beliefs and institutional values may be gleaned from this study.

### **Exosystem**

Exosystem refers to the social circumstances that occur where the individual is not directly or actively involved in and how these circumstances impact the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). A relevant example of this would be state legislation that requires colleges/universities to make policy changes (i.e., affirmative action). The policy changes may impact how a faculty member interacts with or perceives the administration as the institution works to advocate for or against the policy change. The exosystem considers

more distal social factors and their influence on the individual. Bronfenbrenner posited that human beings are part of larger systems that at times are well beyond their control.

### **Macrosystem**

Macrosystem refers to the broader cultural context in which the individual lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This cultural context may include socioeconomics, ethnicity, and other culturally shared experiences of a group. Macrosystem can also encompass ideology. It is important to note that with generational changes, macrosystems can change and evolve. Macrosystems can be thought of as "...societal blue prints for a particular culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, p. 40). The macrosystem is best understood in the context of cultural norms. More specifically macrosystems need to be understood to gain a better understanding of their impact on the microsystem level (Bronfenbrenner).

### **Chronosystem**

Finally, Bronfenbrenner (1994) explained that chronosystems are transitional and sociohistorical events that occur in an individual's life. An example of transitional events in the context of chronosystems would be graduation from graduate school or starting a family. Sociohistorical events might include the War in Iraq or movements such as Black Lives Matter. College marks a substantial transitional period for young adults or even nontraditional students. Additionally, college students have often been at the forefront of sociohistorical issues including antiwar demonstration and other socio-politically charged issues. Faculty can influence how students make sense of sociohistorical events as they occur. Understanding white faculty perceptions of sociohistorical events related to diversity issues may provide context for understanding their racial identity development.

### **Critique of Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development is not without flaws; however, very little scholarship related to this theory exists. Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development is frequently applied to child development (Waters, Cross, & Shaw, 2010). Human development is an ongoing process that happens across the lifespan; therefore, I posited that the application of this theory across the lifespan is warranted. As individuals mature, influencing factors change and the complexity of relationships within and across systems becomes more apparent. The theory does not make clear which system has great influence on an individual at any given time or in any given setting. The Ecology of Human Development model simply posits that each system interacts with the adjacent system and these social interactions influence the individual. The lack of clarification as to which social systems have greatest influence on the individual, makes testing of this theory rather elusive. The breadth and depth of this theory, and the wide array of influential factors encompassed in each system provides explanation for how various societal factors contribute to personal development. However, the lack of focus in this theory makes meaning making ambiguous and somewhat subjective. Nevertheless, Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a cohesive set of systems to consider and interrogate during the research process. This socio-ecological theory notes the "...importance of social relationship but also includes tangible environmental, physical, and ecological variables, such as classrooms and resources" (Allen, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2016, p.99).

### **Theoretical construct development**

WRCM addresses the individualistic, yet shared attitudes possessed by individuals who will comprise the unit of analysis. As white faculty consider the individual perspective

on diversity and inclusion, WRCM provides the context to frame the individual identity development based on outgroup dynamics. However, this model by itself does not adequately encapsulate the totality of diversity. Diversity is a personal and social construct that is uniquely individualize, yet environmentally and community informed. Ecology of Human Development Theory addresses the communal aspect of diversity, which is the phenomena of interest. The environmental factors may have varied degrees of influence and will be assessed on an individual basis. However, as multiple cases are analyzed, themes may be identified that will contribute to existing knowledge related to the Ecology of Human Development Theory. The coupling of these theories creates a theoretical construct that sufficiently addresses the development of diversity perceptions.

These theories have guided the research questions and research protocol. In addition to current literature related to this topic, the coupled theories have analyzed to ensure alignment of existing data in an effort to justify their usefulness. Figure 2 illustrates the convergence of these theories to establish a theoretical concept that will serve as underpinning of this study. It is important to note the absence of the chronosystem in the figure provided. The chronosystem is a significant component for consideration when reviewing the Ecology of Human Development Theory and events that are consistent with chronosystem classification occur across the life span for each individual and have varied impact on individual development

Respecting the multiplicity of identities that an individual possesses is illustrated in the microsystem. For the purpose of this study, racial identity was of particular interest as the role of faculty. Although additional roles/identities may be divulged through the

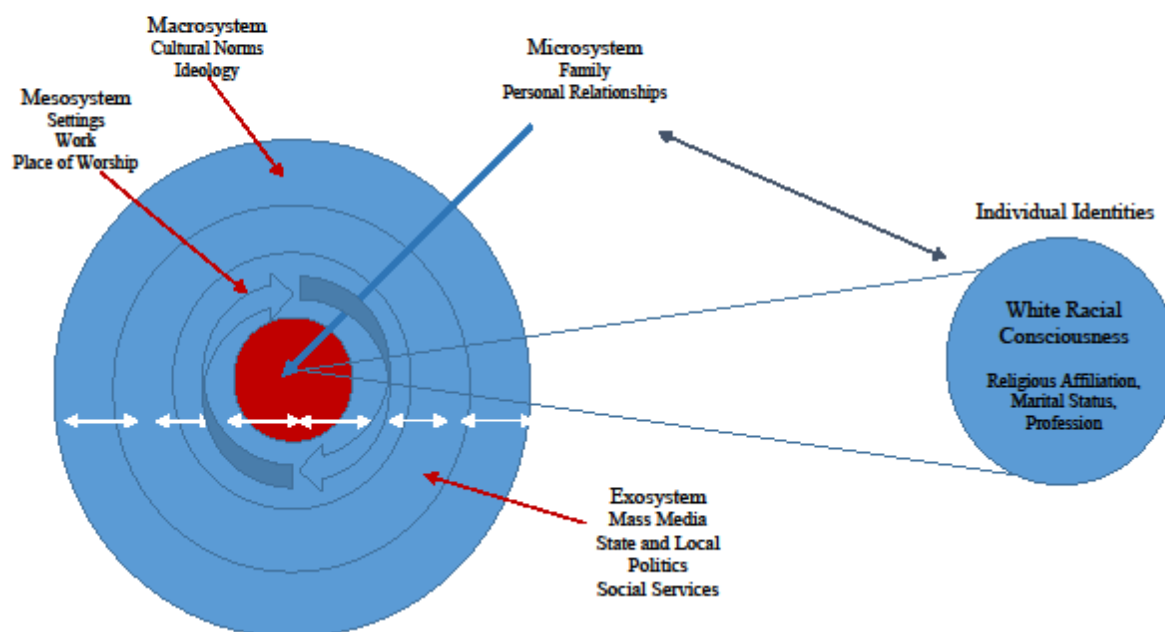


Figure 2. Diversity Theoretical Construct of WRCM and Ecology of Human Development

interview process, the focus of the analysis in this research was specifically on white racial identity and social influences that shaped white faculty diversity understanding. Additional information pertaining to methodology, and data collection and analysis are provided in the next chapter.

### **CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the research design employed in this study. As community colleges serve a more diverse population while simultaneously seeking to improve student success, faculty continue to be an influential partner in serving the broad range of students who represent our pluralistic society. Limited research exists on the perception of diversity in the classroom from the community college faculty perspective, specifically the white faculty vantage point. This study sought to fill the void by allowing white community college faculty in a rural setting to share their voice. The purpose of the study was to ascertain white faculty perceptions of their institution's commitment to diversity and how this perception is enacted in the community college classroom. This study brings to light pedagogical approaches used in the classroom, existing support services available and professional development, if any, for white faculty who are teaching an increasingly diverse environment.

The following questions were used to guide the research to address the perceptions of white faculty regarding diversity:

1. How do white faculty members' backgrounds influence their perception of diversity?
2. How do white faculty in rural community colleges define diversity?
3. How does the institution's commitment to diversity shape faculty perceptions of diversity?
4. How does being a rural community effect white faculty's perception of diversity?
5. How do white faculty in rural institutions perceive diversity in their classroom, in their curriculum and in their pedagogy?



### **Qualitative Research Paradigms**

Qualitative research as a method of inquiry seeks to understand a subject using the researcher as the filter or research instrument (Lichtman, 2010). Often compared and contrasted with quantitative research which relies on hypotheses testing and statistical analysis, qualitative research seeks to address the meaning or why behind the phenomena of interest to get a deeper level of understanding (Yin, 1981). Diversity, as previously noted, has often been categorical in nature in that people are often grouped by common characteristics and then contrasted with other groups who lack those common characteristics. Despite common characterizations, this research sought to look beyond the confounds of categorical placement and move beyond quantitative prediction. The research may provide insight on how diversity is embraced and operationalized in rural institutions as well as examine how current practices address the multiplicity of student identities that exist to impact student success. Based on the research questions and the desire to have a deeper understanding of white faculty perceptions of diversity, this analysis that allowed for voice provided the context needed to garner new knowledge to add to the existing body of research.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

The researcher as the research instrument is a characteristic of qualitative research that brings interpretation to the forefront on discourse on qualitative research (Crow, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avry, & Sheikh, 2011). The researcher's perception of how truth is derived, how knowledge is constructed, and the researcher's assumptions based on their lived experience, all influence the interpretation of data and is embedded in this research. These concepts, known as ontology, epistemology, and axiology must be

acknowledged as a means of addressing the implications for the researcher impact on the research. A detailed review of my philosophical perspective on each is detailed below.

### **Ontology**

My positionality as an African American, cisgender, female PhD student has informed my understanding of truth as being subjective in nature. I recognize that how I experience the world differs from individuals who have different socioeconomic, racial, ethnic backgrounds. I also acknowledge that I experience the world differently than those individuals who represent the dominant culture. As a professional, I serve as college administrator and am often among the youngest when working with staff, faculty and other college administrators. In my profession, my age often places me in the minority group. I did not attend a community college as an undergraduate student; however, I have 10 years of experience in community college, with 7 years in administrative roles. Nevertheless, my experience as an administrator does not allow me to assume that I understand the experience of faculty in the classroom.

I grew up in a single parent, middle class home with a mother who worked in education. My mother was a strong proponent of higher education and set the expectation that attending college was a minimum requirement. Growing up I lived in the Midwest in the state of Illinois and participated in a talent and gifted programs that often resulted in me being one of few and, in most instances, the only minority student in my classes. In my primary education I never had a teacher who I could identify as non-white. However, I noticed that my mother, who was an African American social studies teacher at my school, taught very different content in her courses that included black history. Upon attending Northern Arizona University for my undergraduate education, I had my first instructor who I

identified as a racial or ethnic minority. When I attended college I was exposed to courses that were specific to cultural studies, which provided a broader perspective of the various historical and cultural concepts that had not been shared with me in my previous educational experiences. The conglomeration of these experiences has influenced my interest in researching diversity in education, specifically higher education. As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge my positionality and its impact on my interpretation of my findings and I posit that this does not represent bias. My positionality represents my lens.

My collegiate experience has reinforced my rejection of the positivist position on truth. Positivists conjecture that there is an absolute truth and that objectivity exists in research (Peters & Burblules, 2004). The various cultural perspective and interpretations of historical and social events have enabled me to grow and understand that much of what has been presented as “truth” in my compulsory education was, in fact, one very narrow mostly white male interpretation of actual events. I have also grown to understand that, as I learn more and am exposed to new information, my interpretation of events and happenings has changed over time. I liken this to hermeneutics in that I am now able to consider the person behind the words to make meaning of the whole (Rennie, 2012). If one is able to reflect on previous events and interpret them differently than they had in the past based on new knowledge gained, this also represents truth. I see truth as interpretative and subjectively constructed or co-constructed. These views may be evident in the research as I interviewed participants and asked them to share what has shaped their perception of diversity. Their reflections represent multiple truths and together common themes were interpreted to make meaning of the conglomeration of their expressions. The convergence of their voices served as evidence of fact (Yin, 1981).

**Epistemology**

I have limited experience with teaching. The experience I do have is applicable to the K-12 system. I do not profess to understand the dynamics of how personal experience, academic freedom, and an institution's explicit or implicit commitment to diversity (or lack thereof) impact diversity in the classroom. However, I do serve as a community college administrator and understand the power dynamics that are perceived to exist amongst faculty and administration. Nevertheless, this understanding is of no consequence as it relates to this study, given my position as a doctoral researcher.

When considering the theoretical underpinning of this study, the Ecological Human Development Model posits that individuals experience growth and development as a result of interactions across each system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). With this in mind, the findings of this research are demonstrative of co-constructed knowledge between myself as the researcher and the study participants. Through our interactions, new understanding was found.

**Axiology**

The phenomenon of interest is faculty perceptions of diversity. Diversity, as previously stated, is experienced differently by individuals and is socially constructed. The research questions that guided this study, when paired with the theoretical framework, aligned the qualitative methodology by addressing faculty perceptions of diversity and how this understanding is enacted professionally. More specifically, case study approach allowed for an in-depth review of the personal experiences of the participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Yin, 1981). Furthermore, a case study approach allowed for examination of the phenomena of interest in a real-time setting (Yin).

## Methods

The research question presented in the study lend themselves to a case study approach to inquiry. According to Yin (1981), case study methodology can be used as an exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research. A key component of a case study approach is the bound systems that connect the unit of analysis (Jones et al., 2014). These boundaries helped determine what was studied and what is outside of the scope of the research. Beyond identifying what was studied, case study as a qualitative research approach acknowledge there are many factors that co-exist to influence the experience of the faculty and the students. Stake (2010) noted that the purpose of qualitative research is not to establish causation but, rather, to describe and explain the experience of that which is being researched. This study was conducted to ascertain how faculty formed their perceptions of diversity and to what extent their racial identity and institutional factors influenced how this plays out in their classrooms. Congruent with Yin (2014), this study may shed light on the theoretical principles to assist in understanding similar cases. In this study the unit of analysis was Parcard Community College (PCC), a multi-campus institution in the Midwest. Each faculty member's perception of diversity serve as embedded cases. The faculty are sub-units situated within the larger case. Faculty were "...analyzed within the subunits separately (within case analysis), between the different subunits (between case analysis), and across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis)" to better understand the larger case (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). The characteristics that created the boundaries for the case are the locale of the institution and the rural community it serves. Additionally, the faculty self-identified as white and being representatives of members of the dominant culture further bound the case. Adherence to these boundaries was guided by the research questions which were

developed based on the theoretical constructs. This approach is aligned with a Yinian methodological approach; however, a point of divergence is generalizability (Yazan, 2015). The selection of the rural Midwestern institution further delineated this case study and, thus, limits its generalizability. By examining this single institution and reviewing the faculty members' commitment to diversity, I developed a deeper understanding of the institution and situated the phenomena of interest (Jones et al., 2014).

### **Sampling**

A single case study method was used along with purposeful, homogeneous sampling. The sampling method I utilized was due, in part, to the participants' need to have the common characteristic of being white and working in a rural setting. Embedded cases provided a rich data set for comparison and contrast and add validity and trustworthiness to the study (Cross et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2014, Yin, 1981). Analyzing embedded cases within the context of the larger case provides the opportunity for in depth understanding of the outcomes (Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 1981).

The study included six participants as to not be representative of too few cases, which would limit confidence of the findings (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, the embedded case approach added to the studies transferability or the extent that results can speak to a broader context; however, generalizability from the quantitative research tradition was not necessarily the goal. Embedded cases align well with Yinian case study methodology; however, Yin posited that case studies can have some degree of generalizability (Yazan, 2015). Furthermore, the selection of a specific institutions further delineated this case study and limited the study's generalizability. By examining a single institution and reviewing

their commitment to diversity, I was able to further develop and situate the phenomena of interest (Jones et al., 2014).

Recruitment procedures included outreach to faculty in a wide variety of disciplines to include, but not limited to: history, sociology, human services, education, and fine arts as these fields lend themselves to discussions related to diversity. These disciplines are also representative of areas that address broader social constructs that align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory because they consider larger societal impacts on human interactions and/or outcomes. Career and technician education programs in the allied health tradition were also included in the recruitment procedures.

A list of previous of Rural Community College Alliance Conference attendees was obtained to consider prospective research participants. An email requesting to be connected to the institution's decision-makers regarding research study participation was sent to attendees. After being forwarded decision-makers' names, a brief conversation related to the research topic and the intent of the study was shared with the institution who agreed to participate in the study. Upon indicating an interest in participation in the study, my Institutional Review Board Approval from Iowa State University was shared with Parcard Community College and their IRB protocol was completed and approved (see Appendix A).

### **Site**

Parcard Community College (pseudonym) administrative office is situated in the Midwest in a rural community with a population fewer than 25,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This region in the Midwest is noted as having an emergent immigrant population and is consistent with the literature regarding rural communities and expected non-white populations growth (U.S. Census Bureau). While students are not the focal point of this

study, enrollment data are displayed in Table 1 to provide insight into the students who are served in PCC's campuses.

After receiving IRB approval, a recruitment email was sent to potential participants (see Appendix B). A noted limitation of this approach was that the individuals who opt to participate may be more interested in diversity or feel they have a strong sense of commitment to diversity work. This is discussed in further detail in the section on limitations. Prospective study participants who responded to the recruitment email were forwarded a background questionnaire (see Appendix C) to gather pertinent demographic information. Since the study focused on understanding white faculty perceptions of diversity within the context of PCC, this clearly defined focus lead to the selection of participants who met the following criteria: (a) identified as white or Caucasian, and (b) had a minimum of one year of full-time instruction at PCC. One year of teaching was required so that faculty

Table 1. Enrollment at Parcard Community College, fall 2017

<b>Total enrollment</b>	2,221
<b>Undergraduate enrollment</b>	2,221
<b>Percent of Undergraduate enrollment</b>	
<b>by gender</b>	
Men	40.6%
Women	59.4%
<b>by race/ethnicity</b>	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.5%
Asian	0.6%
Black or African American	2.1%
Hispanic/Latino	7.7%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.1%
White	83.5%
Two or more races	2.0%
Race/ethnicity unknown	1.5%
Non-resident alien	1.8%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017.



could reflect on their experiences as a full-time faculty member and speak to their experience in the institution. With less than one year of experience, it was perceived that faculty may not have had enough exposure to institutional processes, procedures or professional development to fully understand the common practices of the institution.

A background questionnaire was sent to prospective participants in spring 2018 and used to qualify participants for this study based on the criteria stated above. Table 2 provides an overview of demographics of the research participants. A more in-depth participant narrative is provided in Chapter 4.

Table 2. Demographics of faculty participants

Name	Tenure at PCC	Ethnicity	Age range	Gender	Socioeconomic Status	Additional relevant information
Judi	10+ yrs.	German	45-54	Female	\$90,000-\$120,000	Previous K-12 teacher; Christian; married; mother
Melinda	10+ yrs.	German	45-54	Female	\$120,000+	denominational Christian; mother
William	10+ yrs.	Mix Slavic-Anglo	65-74	Male	\$60,000-\$90,000	Ph.D.; J.D.; Non-denominational Christian
Suzy	10+ yrs.	Caucasian	45-54	Female	\$60,000-\$90,000	Previous K-12 teacher; spent several years as adjunct; Presbyterian
Miriam	10+ yrs.	Midwestern	55-64	Female	\$60,000-\$90,000	previous K-12 teacher; raised Catholic; liberal
Scarlett	10+ yrs.	European decent	35-44	Female	\$120,000+	Ph.D.; of Christian tradition generally nonreligious; liberal

### Participant profile

Each participant was provided an opportunity to share past and present experiences that helped shape who they are and how they see the world. There interview process allowed for in-depth encounters that helped me better gain insight into who each participant is and

what their major influences are. A brief overview of each participant is provided to give the reader a deeper appreciation for each individual beyond the visual representation provided in Table 1.

### **Judi**

A mother, wife and educator, Judi positions herself with respect to the various roles she plays and the connections associated with each of these roles. Judi places high value on family, spirituality, experiential learning, and she believes in the impact that education can have on a person and a community. Her background as a farm kid with German roots has also created a culture she describes as hard working. She is positive, optimistic, and has faith that she and the institution will continue to grow and support the needs of all students, including those with diverse needs.

### **Melinda**

Wearing the hat of mother before everything, Melinda is committed to a collaborative learning environment where all students feel encouraged that they can and will learn. Based on her college experience at PCC, she knows firsthand how transformative a diverse educational experience can be. Her farming background, paired with generations of educated professionals in her family, set her apart from many in her rural community. She attributes her upbringing and German heritage in establishing a value system rooted in hard work and religion. She is sensitive to the lack of resources available to poor and first-generation students.

### **William**

A self-proclaimed contrarian, William notes a logic-based approach that informs his views. He values meritocracy and notes he has established himself as well-respected within

the institution. William values challenging status quo and questioning authority. He notes the traditional notion of family and education are among his influences. Additionally, his experience being raised on both the East and West coasts of the United States have shaped his perception of culture and diversity. He has questioned the diversity agenda, and has had personal experiences that caused him to believe diversity may be in conflict with merit.

### **Suzi**

Being born and raised in the rural Midwest region served by PCC has been an influential factor in Suzi's curiosity in learning more about how others experience the world. Knowing the world is full of culture and open to a wide variety of perspectives, Suzi balances the expectations of maintaining her family's traditions while embracing the uniqueness of diversity. Suzi believes college provides a platform for students to learn from other's experiences and views. She values learning from her students' diverse backgrounds and allows them the space to reach and teach other students.

### **Miriam**

A self-described rebel, Miriam is continuously surprised by what she considers to be narrow mindedness of PCC's rural communities. Miriam values democracy and civic engagement, and tries to instill a sense of responsibility to civic engagement in her students. She is a Democrat in a community that very conservative. Being a child of a military family has shaped her views on how she experiences the world and sense of community. Additionally, her relationship with her child and her international travels have shaped how she views rural living and diversity as a whole.

### **Scarlett**

Being raised in a highly religious, conservative culture and then attending a small liberal arts college was an eye-opening experience for Scarlett. Her experiences in her early college years caused her to question many of the fundamental views and beliefs that were established in her formative years. Education, a significant influencer, has impacted how Scarlett sees the world and embraces people with backgrounds different than her own. She has an advocacy-based approach to working with students, particularly first-generation students, and she challenges them to see things from other people's perspective. Another influential factor in Scarlett's life is a feeling of not fitting in. Raised in the Eastern region of the country and holding liberal political views has resulted in a sense of loneliness in a rural community that embrace locals, rurality, and conservatism.

### **Demographic and personal questionnaire**

A questionnaire was used to gather background and demographic information on the each of the participants. Surveys and questionnaires are usually associated with the quantitative tradition of research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012); however, the questionnaire was helpful in identify common traits and themes among the participants. Information related to the participants' gender, tenure in the institution, religious/spiritual affiliation, and other measures were considered in alignment with the current literature related to propensity to use culturally relevant pedagogy or factors that influence perception of diversity from a faculty viewpoint. In alignment with Census data, the questionnaire used government standards related to race; however, other questions left room for open-ended remarks. The questionnaire was combined with two semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, field notes, a review of syllabi and institutional programming, and analytical memos as

methods of data collection. Demographic information was collected prior to the first interview.

## **Interviews**

Two interviews were conducted with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length. Interviews were conducted to gather unique information and interpretations of the participants as well as seek information that cannot be gathered from observations (Stake, 2010). The interview protocol was established and prepared prior to interviews being conducted. The first interview protocol focused on the participants understanding of diversity and their perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity. The second interview focused on the participants understanding of their culture, factors that influence their perceptions of cultural and whiteness, and their perception of social justice/equity. Prior to conducting interviews and contacting participants, the Iowa State University Internal Review Board (IRB) approved all interview questions as part of the review process.

The interviews focused on each faculty member's understanding of diversity. The interviews helped to determine influences, both environmental and experiential, that have shaped the faculty members' perceptions of diversity and provided insight into how their responses were connected to Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory. An exploration of how diversity views influenced their pedagogical approaches and perception of institutional support was also gleaned from this study.

The use of interviews and the case study approach aligned with making sense of racial identity and gaining a better understanding of what factors influence identity development and perceptions of diversity. There are both personal experiences and

environmental factors that shape identity development and the social construction of diversity. These concepts cannot be explained by observation alone. Case study methodology allowed for multiple interactions with research participant through various data collection methods, in turn, allowing me to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of interest and connect the themes that emerged back to theory. Additionally, Yin (2012) noted that open-ended interviews allow for researchers to learn more about how participants construct reality. Reality construction was particularly important for understanding white racial identity and identifying whether or not white faculty members saw themselves as privileged because of their racial identity. Because of the complex nature of racial identity and diversity, two interviews were conducted and transcribed. Participants were provided an opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews for editing, redacting or for expanding upon their commentary. Additionally, participants were provided a journal reflection form (see Appendix G) for completion after reading through their interview or after reflecting on the interview.

The first interview and the associated questions were used to unpack the participants' perceptions of diversity and was informed by Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development. The second interview provided an in-depth examination of participants' racial identity. These short case study interviews were used to corroborate and challenge theory (Yin, 2014), and explain thematic outcomes related to white faculty perceptions of diversity and its impact on the classroom. These are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 and 5.

### **Field observation and document review**

In addition to interviews, classroom field observation were also conducted. The purpose of the observation was to gain additional insight as to how diversity and inclusion

are enacted in the real-world setting in alignment with case study methodology (Yin, 2014). Observations were used and informed by the theoretical lens (Jones et al., 2014). A document was developed to guide the research a field observation, and utilized during the observation process (see Appendix F). The field observations were used to find meaning in participants' commentary that was gathered from the data collected in semi-structured interviews. In conjunction with the direct observations, field notes were used to assist in identifying emergent themes. Stake (2010) posited that field observations include using all of the researcher's senses to note that which is observed. Thus, field notes were necessary to capture the real-time events. In addition to field notes, analytic memos were used to bracket personal bias, to ensure the boundaries of the study were maintained and to assist in the development of the autoethnography that denotes my experience and how I might be able to advocate for change in pedagogical approaches to enhance diversity and inclusion.

One classroom observation was scheduled and conducted with each participant. Observing in the participants' classroom, assisted in triangulating the data by adding another level of data collection (Creswell, 2013). Field notes were taken to record the observed pedagogical approaches used in each classroom to determine if observations in the field aligned with questionnaire and interview responses. As noted, WRCM posited that a correlation between behavior, attitude, and affect exists. (Rowe et al., 1994). Data collected during observations were initially considered relevant interpretative data (Stake, 2010). However, in alignment with Stake, the field observation was designed to take place between the two scheduled interviews as to allow for aggregative data to emerge. However, due to participants' scheduling conflicts not all field observations occurred between participant interviews. Stake noted that initial data collected in observations may seem relevant;

however, as more information is gleaned from additional data sources patterns may emerge that initially were not seen in the observation. Though the intent was to conduct the initial interview prior to classroom observation, faculty availability did not always allow for this approach. Of the six participants, three faculty allowed for classroom observation prior to the initial interview. Having the final interview conducted after the field observation was not critical to the research findings and data interpretation, and posed no limitation to the study. Interactions between the researcher and that which was being observed were minimal during the field observation and avoided when possible to eliminate the perception of being intrusive toward the participants (Jones et al., 2014).

Finally, to gain a better understanding of the demonstrated commitment to diversity a review of documents occurred. Case study methodologist use document review to corroborate evidence gleaned from other methods of data collection (Yin, 2014). This procedure included identifying, selecting and analyzing data contained in various documents (Bowen, 2009). To guide the research, a document review guide was developed to identify items for consideration to be reviewed as part of the document analysis (see Appendix F). Any information found to be contradictory to other data collected resulted in the further interrogation of the data (Yin, 2014). Of particular interest was the diversity of texts and other educational resources students were guided to by their instructor as noted in the syllabus. This is important because "...the instructor facilitates the learning by organizing and maintaining an engaging environment for the learner" (Barrett et al., 2007, p. 38). This environment extends beyond the bounds of the classroom and includes content students are expected to cover outside of class. Consistent with the Ecology of Human Development model, the media students were expected to use to inform their knowledge acquisition was



influenced by what sources the faculty felt were most relevant. In higher education, the exosystem, or text resources, play an important role in the classroom setting as they are often a foundational element of a course whose messaging is reinforced through instruction. The review of the diversity of the faculty media sources was important to understand which texts/authors informed their pedagogical and diversity lens. A review of the instructors' course syllabi was used to gauge diversity of texts and authors used in the course to assess whether or not instructors are diversifying their course content to engage all students. Additionally, PCC's website and public documentation related to diversity was reviewed to assess the institutions commitment to diversity. Moreover, an examination of institutional resources provided to faculty related to diversity were reviewed to examine the institutional support for diversity and influence on white faculty, which was analyzed to identify whether or not the findings supported or opposed Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory regarding social influences.

### **Data interpretation**

After all data were collected, first cycle values and emotion coding were used. Values coding served the purpose of the study well in that values coding is best suited for studies that examine identity, intra and interpersonal experiences and the participants' views of the world based on their experiences in a social context (Miles et al., 2014). Values coding includes three types of related codes that are representative of the participants point of view: value, attitude, and belief (Miles et al.). Emotion coding allowed for both expressed emotions to be conveyed, while also allow interpretative inferences to be used when identifying themes (Saldana, 2016). Moreover, analysis using emotion coding allowed me to get to know the individual participants on a deeper level and it allowed for further scrutiny of

the institutional tone related to issues of diversity. I read the transcripts multiple times and replayed excerpts from each interview multiple times to align my observations as designated in my interview notes to account for participant tone, nonverbal communication and pauses or hesitations in responses. I completed analytic memos following review of transcripts.

Through the data interpretation process, the commentary participants provided was weighed against observed behavior and documents provided by the participants. WRCM played a significant role in establishing meaning making as emotions and values were grouped into theme. This theory developed by Rowe et al. (1994) served as a guidepost for grouping common attitudes and behaviors that emerged from participant interviews and observed actions. The typologies provided in the theory are supported with examples of behaviors, beliefs and reactions to race related issues that are consistent with each typology. These examples from the theory assisted in grouping common responses and behaviors.

As I transitioned from first cycle coding to second cycle coding, I developed a coding chart for each participant. The coding charts for both interviews detailed attitudes, values, beliefs and emotions expressed by the participants. Coding charts are helpful when there are multiple subjects in a study (Saldana, 2016). The coding chart from the first interview included a detailed description of the participants definition of diversity along with a brief characterization of the participant based on the questionnaire and initial interview responses. The coding chart for the second interview included all elements of diversity expressed throughout the interview process and influential factors shared that help shape the participants' worldview. In order to determine systems of influence as noted by Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory, repeated references to influential factors, strong emotions and sentiments that were shared, and detailed elaboration on

elements from the participants background questionnaire were used to identify systems of influence among the participants. In vivo coding was used in the coding chart to assist me in referencing specific segments of the transcript that stood out and aided in the iterative process of creating themes. A summary of the data collection was compiled for each participant that outlined influences in their lifespan and how those influences fit within the systems in the Ecology of Human Development Theory. The summary also included strong reactions and responses that were consistent with behaviors outlined in WRCM. The information from the summary was analyzed across the embedded cases and used to make meaning of the overall institution. The values and themes that emerge were analyzed using White Racial Consciousness Model and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Human Development Theory as the underpinning or lens in which meaning will be constructed. The themes that emerged are further discussed in Chapter 4.

Analytical memos or journaling were used throughout the research process, and were conducted on a regular basis in order to enable emerging themes to be categorized and the significance of reoccurring themes to be substantiated (Miles et al., 2014). Furthermore, the use of analytical memos allowed for examination of how I, as the researcher, was situated within the context of the study. Stake (2010) posited that qualitative researcher wants to improve how things work and that advocacy should be a part of each researcher's lifestyle. The memos were analyzed to bracket personal bias, ensure the boundaries of the study were maintained and served in the development of the autoethnography that denotes my experience and how I might be able advocate for change in pedagogical approaches to enhance diversity understanding.

Autoethnography, as noted by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), is the systematic approach of introspection and emotional recall to understand the experience of the researcher. Reflexivity is particularly important given my racial identity and the significance of diversity and inclusion as a minority higher education professional. The experiences I had as a researcher, spending several days in this rural community, spending many hours listening to faculty share their experiences, and spending several months hoping to gain a better understanding of whiteness and whiteness has not only informed my interpretation of the data but also impacted me on a personal and professional level. Autoethnography enabled me to clearly delineate readings, experiences, and data collection points that had a significant impact on me as a researcher and how I interpreted the data.

### **Triangulation**

The field notes and analytic memos were used as a method of triangulation. Analytic memos identified my own reactions during the course of the observations. This method of triangulation was paired with the pilot study, which was conducted at a community college in the Midwest in summer 2017. The pilot study assisted in the development of the interview protocol and aided in the alignment of the research questions and theory. The pilot study was comprised of one interview and one classroom observation. The interview was recorded, but not transcribed. The data was not analyzed using qualitative coding techniques. However, journaling regarding this experience was conducted and was used as part of reflexivity practices when conducting field observations.

### **Limitations**

As an African American, cisgender female interviewing white participants regarding their perception of diversity may have created tension in that participants, who have not

achieved a certain comfort level with their racial identity or who have views they assumed may be contrary to my own, may not have had candid dialog with me. Conversely, individuals who were attuned to racial equity may have overcompensated in their dialog in an effort to attempt to identify with me as a person of a non-dominant culture that has been oppressed. Furthermore, the dynamic of race is only one component of diversity; however, the visible difference between myself and the participants may have skewed examples in our conversation toward racial diversity and lessen their dialog regarding ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender or other matters related to diversity.

As discussed previously, diversity in many instances lacks a shared definition. A common definition was not provided to the research participant to avoid projecting a construct onto the participants at any point in the research process. This was seen as a limitation in that participants' perceptions of what constitutes diversity was widely different among one another, making the transferability of the findings somewhat limited.

Faculty were invited to participate in the study. For this reason, it might be perceived that those faculty who elected to participate in this study were more likely to be diversity advocates. The presupposition that individuals who are diversity adverse, lack confidence in the area of diversity dialog, or those who are apathetic toward this topic were less likely to elect to participate was substantiated by commentary provided by the participants. Though the degree in which individuals who participate in this study are knowledgeable about diversity varied, it was a fair assumption that the study participants leaned toward a positive position regarding diversity.

### **Significance of the Study**

Institutions of higher education are unfortunately lagging behind in proportional representation of diverse faculty, despite the increased number of women and people of color earning advanced degrees (Lundy-Wagner et al., 2013). An institution's ability to hire diverse faculty, does not excuse it from its obligation to prepare students to be global citizens. At the same time, community colleges are seeking to improve degree attainment rates for all students, including students of color (Wyner, 2014). According to Tinto's Theory of Student Departure, students leave because of academic problems, failure to acclimate to the college culture, or lack of commitment to the college or university (Long, 2012). One way to improve a student's commitment to the institution is to create an environment that fosters a sense of community and is inclusive for all student. Institutions cannot rely on its few non-white faculty to be the sole providers of diverse experiences in the classroom. In order to retain and graduate students, colleges will need all faculty, including white faculty, to address diversity and to be inclusive as a means to improve student outcomes and completion. Furthermore, many institutions aspire to have a culture that is appreciative of diversity and strives for inclusion; however, there are very few supports in place to support white faculty in incorporating diversity in their classroom, curriculum or pedagogy. This study was conducted to provide insight into why white faculty in rural community colleges may or may not engage in diversity practices in the classroom. By exploring their perceptions and beliefs, the findings can be used to glean from the experience of faculty to improve institutional support and ultimately improve student outcomes.

## CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of white faculty teaching in rural community colleges in hopes of identifying how these faculty understand or appreciate the importance of diversity in their institution's commitment and in their classroom. As noted previously, rural communities tend to be homogeneous in demographic make-up, and the professoriate is predominately white whose faculty are often teaching students with diverse backgrounds that may be vastly different from their own. As community colleges in rural settings tend to be the epicenter of cultural diversity, this study was conducted to understand better the influence of white racial identity and institutional commitment regarding diversity. influence. More specifically, as the researcher, I wanted to understand how six white faculty perceived diversity at their rural community college.

This chapter is organized to illustrate the four themes emerging through the participants' narratives gathered from the data collection and analysis: (1) Feeling Othered; (2) Operationalizing Diversity; (e) Historical and Hypothetical Privilege; and (4) Students as Teacher. The four themes are then broken down into subthemes that emerged from these broader overarching themes. Table 3 illustrates the themes and subthemes that emerged.

1. Feeling Othered: (a) Outsiders, and (b) Nondominant Political Views.
2. Operationalizing Diversity: (a) Womanhood and Advocacy, (b) Spirituality, Civic Engagement, and (c) Weak or Failed Attempts.
3. Historical and Hypothetical Privilege: (a) Historical and Systemic Perspectives, and (b) Desire to Deny.
4. Student as Teachers: (a) Students as Cultural Informants, (b) Self-Reflection and Student-Centered Teaching, and (c) Athletes: The Epicenter of Racial Diversity.

Table 3. Themes emerging from perceptions of white faculty regarding diversity in their classroom as well as their institution's commitment to diversity

Feeling Othered	Operationalizing Diversity	Historical and Hypothetical Privilege	Students as Teachers
Outsiders	Womanhood and Advocacy	Historical and Systemic Perspectives	Students as Cultural Informants
Nondominant Political Views	Spirituality and Civic Engagement	Desire to Deny	Self-Reflection and Student-Centered Teaching
	Weak and Failed Attempts		Athletics: The Epicenter of Racial Diversity

### Emerging Themes and Sub-themes

A snapshot of each of the study participants was shown in Table 2 (see Chapter 2) to provide background and demographic information as to better understand each person. The characteristics are self-descriptors provided from the open-ended background questionnaire and the interviews conducted with each participant. Finally, this chapter contains a section dedicated to William, whose narrative was a general outlier when compared to the other participants. William's point of view warranted special attention as to examine his isolated experience. Figure 3 illustrates the connections between the themes, sub-themes, and the theoretical construct that served as the underpinning for the study.

### Feeling othered

#### Outsiders

Growing up in rural communities appears to provide a sense of comfort and reinforces the notion of normalcy, but also a sense of curiosity of those that differ from the "norm". Judi and Melinda noted a strong sense of identity that was tied to growing up in a rural setting where farming, hard work, faith, and family were central to all that they did. Melinda noted, "*I was born fifteen miles outside of PCC. I was a farm kid.*" She and Judi noted that being a farm kid meant being hardworking and was part of their identity and their



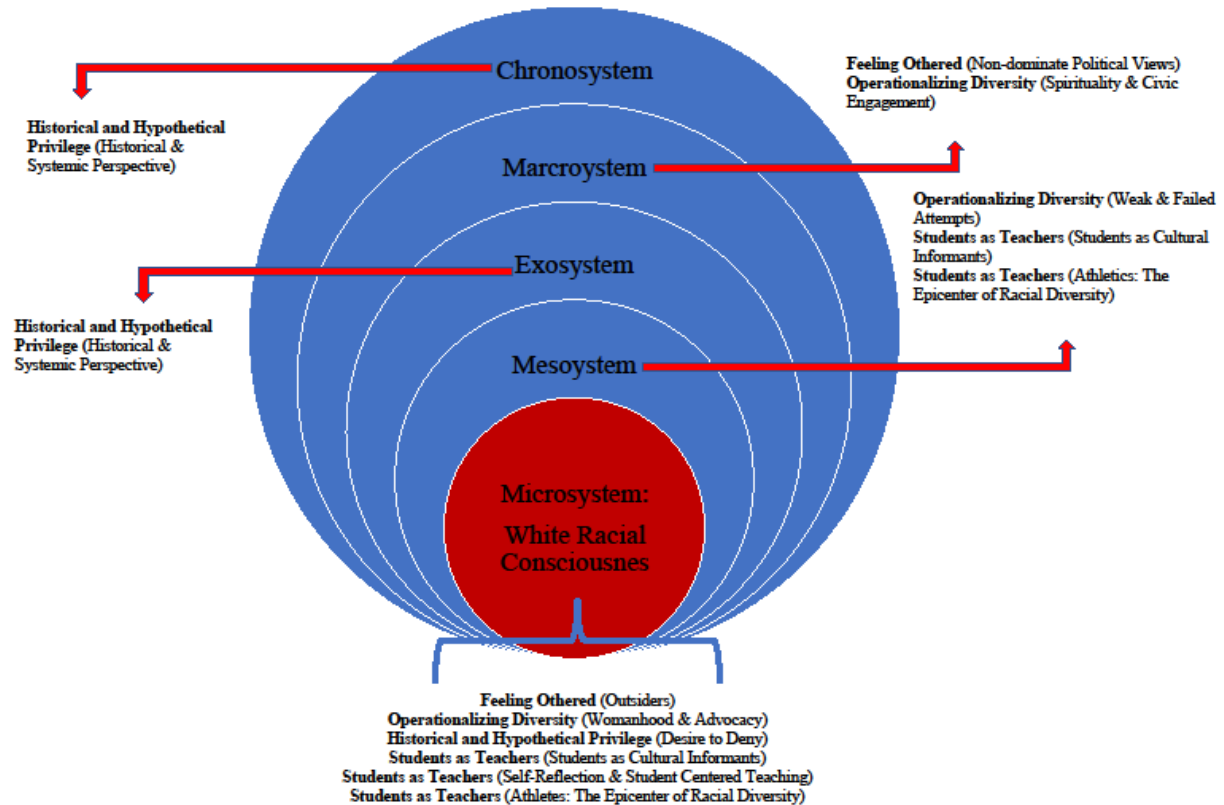


Figure 3. Emerging themes and sub-themes, and their connection to Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Theory and White Racial Consciousness Model

culture. This sense of pride in their rural, farming and faith-based upbringing, is unique to Judi and Melinda, but the strong connection to rurality as a factor that influences what has shaped their perception of diversity is not. Suzi, having also grown up in a small rural community served by PCC, stated: *"I hate it, I just really, really hate it. I feel like I'm embarrassed to be from here. I always have been."* These deep inward feelings run contrary to Judi and Melinda's shared experience, yet the deep-seeded connected to rural upbringing was consistent among the three participants born and raised in PCC's service area. When considering Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development, the relationship and influence of the rural experiences are connected to the macrosystem. Conservatism, hard work, and faith are symbolic of ideology and cultural norms for the PCC community.

Awareness of the shared deep feelings of rural-born participants is essential to understand the concept of “othered”. Othered in this study has been defined as the act of being categorized as being an outsider, or the act of self-categorizing as an outsider based on real or perceived acceptance by others in the community. This definition was adapted from the othering paradigm with a sociological lens. The othering paradigm suggests that this practice is a way in which people identify “us” and “them” along religious, ethnic, racial, and other social constructs (Silva, 2017). All born and raised in various areas across the country, Miriam, Scarlett, and William had a shared feeling of not being wholly accepted because they were not native to rural communities. These othered feelings are an important element that was shared among these faculty who, despite having over 65 years combined in the rural communities served by PCC, still felt like outsiders.

Additionally, Scarlett, who had spent more than 10 years at PCC, noted that during the hiring of faculty: *“They (rural born PCC committee members) have this big fear of they're not going to want to live here, or they're going to be too snobby for us, or they're going to be whatever.”* She went on further to state: *“As an outsider, I find that sometimes painful to see.”* Her sentiments were cloaked in the desire to see the institution truly tap into its diversity pool during their national searches instead of hiring almost exclusively from immediate geographical communities. After further questioning, it became clear that Scarlett not only felt the institution would be richer by seriously considering this type of diversity, but she could also recognize the value an outside perspective can bring as evident in her long-term commitment to PCC.

William reflected on his experience as an outsider and stated that because he was not from the area, he represented walking culture for many locals who had limited interaction

with those who were different from themselves racially or experientially. According to William:

*You realize we're in the middle of the continent, a small rural area. Almost exclusively Euro-American. For me, that's new actually. I tell my colleagues, some of us are literally "walking culture" because we're not from this area. And we're bringing in life experiences and backgrounds, academically, that are totally new-even alien to the folks who live here.*

The use of the term alien spoke to the level of disconnection he felt to the community and how he was received within this rural community.

Miriam also reflected on her introduction to the rural community served by PCC. She stated, *"I was appalled, and sometimes still am, at the parochial outlook of a lot of people around here."* She went on to note that she tried to challenge conformity subtly and felt that *"maybe the powers that be placed me here to be that outside voice."* Her desire to challenge the status quo was evident during her classroom observation where she encouraged students to reach out to state and local official regarding the need for change in their community. Miriam's outsider status came not only from her worldviews that were different from many of her peers but could also be interpreted as lack of connection to the region because of her references to a Midwesterner's worldview as if she were not a Midwesterner.

Having spent the most time in PCC's rural community, Miriam had experienced a high level of frustration throughout her time in the community. She noted, *"I spent a lot of time trying to fit in and then I finally decided a few years ago, what the hell. Why should I bother?"* Despite their extended time in the community, Miriam, Scarlett, and William did not experience a sense of belonging and frequently referenced their outsider status associated with not being native to the rural community.

### **Nondominant political views**

Another source of feeling like an outsider or being othered was associated with the participants' political point of view. The rural community served by PCC and its respective campuses was characterized as “conservative,” “extremely conservative,” and “Trump supporters” by Scarlett, William, and Miriam, respectively. The point was further reinforced by an administrator who was not a participant in the study but offered input as I prepared for interviews with the participants. She noted that when she moved to the area, she had to take her “Obama” keychain off of her keyring so that it did not cause any problem. Scarlett, who showed a politically charged documentary on gun control, noted that she treaded lightly and tried not to appear to be too liberal as to not alienate students and to gain credibility. She stated:

*I'll say that one thing I try to do is... I know that a lot of my students are conservative. I'm liberal, but I want them... I want to be... I want to get credibility with my conservative students. I don't get that by insulting conservatism or insulting. I try not to be super political in the class...*

Her attempts to illustrate how both liberals and conservatives have logic fallacies in their political argument was indicative of minimizing her political affiliation during the field observation. Scarlett referred to Democrats as “crazy liberals” no doubt drawing from the fiery rhetoric of political campaigns and sentiments of conservatives. However, the negative connotations, such as crazy, were never attributed to her conservative counterparts during her lecture. This masking of her worldviews was thematic when considering the other participants in the study who identified as liberal. Moreover, the influence of political ideology was thematic throughout the study and suggested that the macrosystem played a strong role in influencing behaviors and attitudes among the faculty.

Miriam, who had a deep commitment to civic engagement in the form of being aware and involved in local, state and national elections, shared with her class information about how decisions are made at the college and local level. In her interview, she continued further to note, *“I watch a lot of PBS. In fact, I watch lots of different news channels, not Fox New, dear God, but I watch lots of different news.”* She added:

*It’s really hard even to be a Democrat out in this part of the state, much less someone really different. They (conservatives) just assume everyone thinks and feels the same way they do, which is pretty darned conservative. I think it’s really good for our students to be exposed to a lot of different people and a lot of different ways of thinking.*

Miriam described her “coming out” as a Democrat after President Obama was elected, noting that after his election she finally felt the power to do so. She described a very isolated and lonely experience as a Democrat and stated that, for many Democrats, *“We kind of keep our heads down and try not to make trouble.”* These sentiments combined with not being born and raised in the region made it very hard for individuals with different worldviews and lived experiences to “fit,” even though they shared the common characteristic of being white. Despite her recent freedom of expression in outwardly identifying as Democratic, Miriam still expressed a certain level of fear associated with expressing her political worldviews. While she noted a high level of autonomy in the classroom, she feared taking any firm position or stance at an institutional level because that stance may cause problems. More specifically, she reflected on a specific national news story affiliated with one of the state’s regent schools and faculty member who was currently on a watch list.

While William did not explicitly identify his political affiliation, his references to the conservatism of PCC’s rural community and his fear of the impact diversity was having on

political outcomes would suggest he may not be staunchly conservative in his political views. In conversation, William noted that the issues with diversity caused him grave concern, particularly for African Americans. When asked to expound on his concerns he noted that diversity was how “*we ended up with Trump, and that’s a problem.*” It was not entirely clear whether he felt that President Trump and his political positions were the problem, but the inference that our country was divided along racial lines and this division had created extremism in views, and political outcomes was appropriate. William spoke of members of PCC’s rural community as having narrow views. He spoke with a condescending tone and based on his description of the rural community members he presumed are conservative or Republican. However, after further consideration, and considering Scarlett and Miriam’s experience, perhaps the liberal or Democrats were merely silent. Nevertheless, William’s tone and description of the widely conservative rural community might suggest he had nondominant political views when compared to his counterparts in the PCC service area.

Given the experience of the participants, political views appeared to be a source of being “othered.” A final notable finding related to political affiliation was that all locally born study participants (Judi, Melinda, and Suzi) did not mention politics or their specific political views; however, Judi did refer to rural culture as “*pretty conservative.*” This lack of forthright dialog aligned with Miriam’s assessment that individuals in the rural community avoid topics that could potentially be controversial. The lack of reference to politics also aligned with Scarlett’s assessment that many people in the rural community assumed everyone else thought like them and, because of their similarity, they did not need to discuss topics because it was assumed that everyone perceived the world the way they did.

## Operationalizing diversity

### Womanhood and advocacy

Each of the female participants in this study expressed a strong position that diversity was an asset to their institution. Thus, I posited that being female in a rural community that values conservatism entails embracing traditions that are family-centric, male-dominated and patriarchal. These core values are noted in the commentary of the female study participants. Judi, who spoke in the “we” form when answering questions, noted a culture that was led by males in many ways, particularly financially. Many of Judi responses were not specific to just her personal experience; instead, she talked about her family and how they experienced the world together. When asked about her customs, norms, and traditions that helped shape her identity, she noted the following:

*We have some fun traditions and things that I think the girls (daughters) really value. I shared with you that I'm German, my husband is, too. His family actually held to some of the old ways more than mine did like his grandma spoke German. They make fresh Keekla; it's a very German dish. It's a pain in the butt to make, honestly. We all gather together. I usually... I make it on (husband) birthday and Father's Day because it's not hard. It's just hamburger, and sausage squished together and then deep fried in a pastry shell, but it's time-consuming.*

A desire to represent her family unit's experience muted her personal voice and was indicative of her pride in her role as a mother and wife.

Similarly, Melinda noted:

*I do believe as a teacher that my first and most important job is to be a mother, especially in the area that I work, that my students see me balancing work and family. So in that, I guess that's one of my passions...*

She extended the role of mother to the classroom as she said she felt a sense of responsibility to teach students how to balance their careers and family. Additionally, Miriam indicated no desire to stay in PCC's service area, but her marriage was what kept her in the community.

She indicated that she spent much time trying to be the “perfect wife” before her marriage ended in divorce. Lastly, Suzi noted many of her decisions were made based on pleasing her parents and following in their footsteps. She noted that she and her partner had various traditions that were silly, but she continued their traditions because it was an expectation and what her parent had always done. I contended that the women mentioned in this study had internalized external pressures that had shaped their concept of family and ingrained a strong sense of commitment to the “traditional” roles of being a wife. When aligned with the Ecology of Human Development Model, the microsystem, which includes family and other personal relationships, plays an influential role in how the female study participants experienced the world and expressed views. The role of “mother” may assist in promoting empathy because they were often putting the needs of their family at the forefront of their minds. I contended that the ability to empathize also aids in one’s ability to support diversity or exhibit student-centered learning to promote student success. The advocacy attitudes described are unrelated to institutional interventions; instead, they are personal attitudes not influenced by institutional perspective. It is through their womanhood that these study participants operationalized their understanding of diversity.

### **Spirituality and civic engagement**

Both Judi and Melinda expressed strong religious and spiritual connections that were dominant influential factors in how they lived their lives. These study participants both ascribed to Christianity. Judi’s references to being family-centered and religious were notably described, in essence, as one entity- not as two separate factors. She noted that in the farm culture the family worked together and built their life around what was going on in the church and, *“of course, as an adult you were expected to follow suit.”* She mentioned going



to Sunday school as a child and singing in the choir and, then as an adult, teaching Sunday school and still being a member of the choir. She mentioned that church was a daily part her life and significantly shaped who she was. Upon exploring the notion of equitable outcomes in higher education, Judi quoted her pastor saying, *“Only place life is fair is in hell. That’s where you get what you deserve.”* Her comment, made in a lighthearted fashion, provided another glimpse into how Judi made sense of the world and how her faith had impacted not only her worldview but also her diversity advocacy. This commentary also hints at the role of the mesosystem in shaping views. The farm and the church are settings that have substantial influence in the rural environment. These settings act as environmental factors that reinforce the ideology of the macrosystem.

Similarly, Melinda explicitly stated that she was a churchgoer who believed God was her creator and teaching was part of her ministry. She stated, *“God created me to be me, and that He has a plan laid out in front of me, and that the work that I do with students gives me the opportunity to be in this mission field. I very much believe I’m a people person.”* She referenced her life and career as blessings and felt a sense of responsibility to be a blessing to others. She implicitly described her gift of being a people person as a blessing that she used to connect with students. This gift was illustrated in the pedagogical approaches she used in the classroom. The field observation reflected a faculty member who not only sought to engage the students through content, but also one who got to know them more personally through intentional engagement, asking questions and encouraging dialog. She stated, *“A lot of what I do drives ... I should say, a lot of how I prioritize in my culture is based upon God and family.”*

Civic engagement was another quality used to operationalize diversity at PCC. In the broadest sense, civic engagement can be relevant to political and non-political action taken by individuals or by groups. I have interpreted personal, civic engagement of the faculty member and encouragement of students to embrace civic-mindedness by the faculty to represent an underlying factor that influences diversity advocacy. These influential factors are not associated with institutional directives, support or guidance; instead, they are personal beliefs and strategies used to engage students in the college experience.

Scarlett described a sense of responsibility related to preparing students to view the world with a critical lens. When discussing her pedagogical approach, she stated:

*When I teach... it's always trying to...that's one where I feel like you have so much responsibility to select text that are going to reflect a wide variety and are going to open students to differences. I guess what I always do with this is, I try to expose students to something that I feel like is different than them, but they can relate to.*

This sense of responsibility was evident in her teaching observed during fieldwork as well as during our dialog. During the field observation, students viewed a film illustrating an argument for stricter gun laws. The filmmaker, a well-known liberal, was featured to highlight the importance of appropriately positioning an argument. Scarlett followed the film with discussion questions and guided dialog with the group. She encouraged healthy, but minimal, conversation on agreement or disagreement with the filmmaker's position. She was strategic in her approach because she feared the toxicity that liberalism and conservatism dialog in the classroom creates. Scarlett noted that conversation like this could be landmines and cause significant problems for instructors. She shared her fears similar to Miriam, who expressed fear of being on a watch list. Scarlet did not try to change students' opinions but challenge them to point to the various arguments presented in the film that were effective or

ineffective in solidifying their opinions. She encouraged students to consider various perspectives as they engaged in political issues that are important, particularly in their Midwestern state that she referred to as “...*gun loving second amendment types who think wacko liberals don't want them to have guns.*”

The negative connotations associated with traditional liberal views appeared to be a strategy Scarlett used to mask her political “other” status and to gain credibility with students. Regardless of whether or not this strategy was useful, it was evident that Scarlett encouraged students to contemplate a wide variety of perspectives as they considered engaging in political issues. She spoke of political engagement as if it were an understood expectation. At the conclusion of the class discussion, Scarlett began her lecture that had examples that included political ads, pop culture examples, and commercial advertisements. Combined with the film, the examples she provided emphasized politics and added context to the way arguments are formed and how logic fallacies can lead to narrow political views.

Similar to Scarlett, Miriam encouraged students to learn how political structures work. In her class, she briefly discussed state-elected officials and the election governance structure for the college. She discussed power and institutional decision-making. Miriam included the importance of understanding power structures and knowing who the elected officials were so that students could contact them if they had an issue to express. She connected this back to the necessary skills she was teaching students to make the skills they were learning relevant and applicable. Miriam explicitly informed students on the appropriate procedures to follow and individuals to contact to engage in their local and state politics. She made it clear to students that, if they wanted to affect change or if there were decisions they were not happy with; civic and political engagement is a way to affect change.

Miriam's desire to connect students to local and state politics illustrates the level of influence exosystem has had in shaping her views. As previously noted, the exosystem considers mass media, local/state politics and their impact on human development. Despite her military family upbringing which included extensive national travel, Miriam was among the only participants who expressed a strong connection to local and state politics.

Miriam invited her students to attend scheduled campus programs and activities for extra credit at the beginning of her class. I contended that this is a form of non-political civic engagement because Miriam wanted to see students engage in their campus life to support student clubs and activities as well as to increase the vibrancy of the campus community. She noted that making connections was an integral part of the education process and she hoped to facilitate those connections for students.

### **Weak and failed attempts**

Participants in the study spoke of diversity efforts in the institution in aspirational terms. Judi noted, *"You know they try when they're doing our big in-service days, I think they try and include that."* Judi, whose disposition was very positive and upbeat, showed a desire to be supportive of her institution; however, as her narrative developed, it became clear that she struggled to point to original diversity specific programming. She spent a significant amount of time discussing student clubs or organization that cater to diverse student populations (i.e., international club). Suzi's position was similar to Judi's in that she spoke very highly of PCC's commitment to diversity, noting that the institution is *"highly committed."* As she continued in the interview, she also struggled to point to specific diversity programming and noted that the activities director on campus provided a wide variety of programming for students. She then began to list the clubs that were not available

for specific demographics on campus and quickly became conflicted in her position regarding PCC's commitment to diversity. She spoke of speakers who had been brought in a couple of years ago but remembered very little about the content. She ended this part of the interview wondering if PCC had demonstrated enough of a commitment to diversity, based on her experience in the past few years. Likewise, William indicated he was unsure as to whether or not PCC had any level of commitment to diversity, nor was he sure whether there ought to be an institutional commitment to diversity.

Melinda echoed Judi's sentiment to the extent that she spoke of the institution being in support of diversity, but she noted that she did not feel pressure from the institution regarding diversity. She also referenced PCC's annual in-service day and pointed to a speaker who addressed diversity from a generational perspective. She noted that it had been a couple of years ago since that specific speaker had come to campus.

Melinda also spoke of a recent committee she served on for PCC's accreditation and the priority of "understanding other cultures" as a way of helping students learn. She noted, *"it actually was kind of a tough one because it seemed to spin itself as that diversity project, because of the diverse membership on the committee."* She expressed that the diverse needs of the group, comprised of faculty and staff, caused the group to have good dialog, but ultimately the topic of diversity was so broad that each area represented in the committee would continue to take its own path regarding diversity. The ambiguity of diversity proved to be too big of a charge for the group to take on a collective effort around the topic. Although she was not on the committee, Scarlett spoke of the committee work in the following terms: *"It didn't go anywhere. It seemed like it kind of flopped."* This failed

attempt of the committee ran counter to the analysis of documents. PCC's website noted the committee was active and in progress.

Although the demographic make-up of the committee was not provided by PCC, the overall composition of the faculty and staff might suggest that the committee was comprised primarily of whites. The priority of the committee was to develop strategies to improve faculty and staff understanding of other cultures. White Racial Consciousness Model suggests that varied levels of consciousness of one's white identity will manifest in the form of varied attitudes and behaviors (Rowe et al., 1994). Moreover, consistent with Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Model, one would expect attitudes to be influenced by a particular setting/environment. In the case of the diversity committee at PCC, I assigned avoidant typology as the appropriate WRCM status for group work related to diversity. This was evident in the group's failed attempt at operationalizing diversity due to the nature of the charge as being overwhelming and problematic.

Miriam reflected on PCC diversity commitment in terms similar to Melinda. She spoke of support for development opportunities specific to diversity if she chose to participate in conferences and she felt no pressure from the institution regarding diversity efforts. She reflected on the lack of ownership for diversity on campus, noting that no one person or group was responsible for attending to diversity matters on campus.

The overwhelming consensus regarding professional development at PCC was that faculty have opportunities to pursue whatever professional development they choose, assuming there were no financial constraints to make the professional development (PD) opportunity cost prohibitive. The matter of professional development being available, but inaccessible, applied to all types of professional development including diversity training.

Each participant, except Suzi, described PCC as supportive of conference attendance and annual travel; however, Judi, Scarlett and William best described the faculty's responsibility for driving their own growth and development. Judi expressed how she felt supported in her pursuit of professional development: *"I really think that if I went to them with something that I wanted to do, they would support it, budget allowing."* Scarlett, who had been very active in her pursuit of professional development but noted that she needed to do more, stated: *"They're very supportive in that sense (on conference attendance), I think. I don't think there's much; there's really nothing in-house. I wish there was more in-house that we did."*

Similarly, William expressed his experience with professional development concerning self-efficacy:

*I don't think there's a problem with that (conference attendance), but otherwise it's really on me. They will pay for a certain number of professional organizations that I join each year, but otherwise, it's pretty much on me.*

Based on input from Judi, Melinda, Scarlett, Miriam, and William, PCC managed faculty professional development as an external experience that each of the participants appeared to participate in; however, their level of participation varied.

Judi described a professional development experience that helped shape her understanding of diversity. Early in her career she attended a conference in a metropolitan community and she shared an experience with an African American woman who helped her understand she had a lot to learn regarding diversity. Her take away was: *"I admit I don't understand, but I care, and I want to do what I can to support diversity."* Judi's experience with professional development extended beyond professional lecture and included the practice of empathy and learning from others experience. This method of knowledge acquisition will be discussed in greater detail under the theme of Students as Teachers.

Melinda shared that she relied heavily on her years of experience and did not take advantage of the PD that requires extensive travel. She referred to this type of PD as advanced professional development. She noted that she took advantage of online opportunities that were available. Reliance on online PD resources was consistent with Judi, Miriam and Scarlett's experiences. Melinda explained that her choice to use online resources and attend conferences closer to home was personal, and the institution had never held her back from exploring advanced PD.

Conversely, Suzi felt that more could be done by the institution to support faculty PD. Unlike the other faculty participants, Suzi indicated there was more PD available than she anticipated when she began at the college a few years ago; however, she felt the quality and relevance of the PD opportunities were lacking. Finally, Scarlett had taken advantage of the resources that were available but felt more could be done to support understanding of diversity and online instruction. She and Miriam relied heavily on online PD resources, particularly those related to diversity.

Notably, each faculty member was generally responsible for finding their own PD opportunities. Further, the consensus was that faculty must travel to neighboring geographical areas, urban communities, or search for online resources to get the training they desired. In some instances, some faculty acknowledged that they utilized resources that were intended for student engagement for professional development to gain perspective on culture and diversity.

Skepticism and hesitation in belief in diversity practices related to hiring emerged as an issue in this study. Miriam described her experience several years ago while participating on a hiring committee. She recalled an interview candidate from an urban Midwest



community who asked the community about how the institution encouraged or supported diversity. Miriam described a shift in body language in the room. She noted that the committee was not prepared to engage in diversity dialog and the candidate was not invited to campus for an interview. While she used this example to describe the institution's commitment to diversity (or lack thereof), she did indicate she felt there was not “an open campaign” against diversity. This description of unconscious or unintended bias was shared among all of the female participants and is further discussed as follows.

Upon reflecting on PCC’s commitment to diversity, Judi referenced PCC’s interview process and answered the question with much pause. She stated:

*That’s an interesting question....I don’t think there’s any type of outward bias at all. I don’t even think that there’s an undercurrent of bias. Sometimes I think that in an attempt to not appear biased, they maybe do some things that kind of make it hard for others. I don’t know how we ever balance the whole same experience, same background. How do we select that?*

Then she described how equity in the hiring process was reinforced on each committee and committee members were reminded about the qualities they would be looking for in candidates for hire. Next, she quickly redirected the conversation to a student-focused discussion on being welcoming to students.

Likewise, Scarlett reflected on interviewing and selecting candidates with similar experiences and similar backgrounds:

*There are times where I feel like we could, that we end up hiring people from the local area when they are not necessarily the best candidate. Again, there’s not a single individual search where I can say they’ve behaved discriminately here. Or I don’t know, but it just feels like, I feel like more often than not, we do end up hiring local people when we do have a national pool.*

Scarlett felt frustration and disappointment in PCC’s propensity to exclude candidates from outside the immediate geographical region. She perceived that rural communities have an

identity complex wherein they believe that people from the outside would not stay long-term at PCC, are overqualified and do not want to live in a rural community. Scarlett attributed these outcomes in hiring to unconscious bias, which aligned with Judi's comments. She felt many people who could enhance diversity were excluded during the screening of curriculum vitae. As an outsider, she found these hiring outcomes to be painful and disappointing. This also points to a rural community's affinity for those who espouse the same rural ideology previously noted. The rural community of PCC was strongly influenced by the ideology of their macrosystem.

An outlier in this study, William spoke of skepticism and resentment in hiring practices related to diversity. His experiences were not from hiring committees at PCC; instead, they were experiences related to being rejected because of diversity initiatives. Nevertheless, his skepticism fit the perspective that institutions have weak policies and practices in place to ensure diversity and/or equity in their hiring practices. His experience as an outlier is discussed later in this chapter.

## **Historical and hypothetical privilege**

### **Historical and systemic perspective**

All participants, except William, acknowledged the existence of white privilege. The participants who acknowledged white privilege in the study conceptualized white privilege in both historical and hypothetical contexts. When asked about how they felt when they heard the term white privilege, the faculty expressed a wide array of emotions and sentiments.

Melinda spoke of white privilege as an extreme view, noting:

*I just feel that we need to not get into extremes on one side or the other. That we're all better off if we just try to understand that yes, things in history have been unfair, things go on today are not fair, that life is hard for many, many,*

*many people. There are folks who have privilege, and sometimes it's white, sometimes it doesn't have anything to do with your skin tone.*

Melinda's sentiments on white privilege as an extreme view and her feelings that "we all should move forward because life is difficult for" a lot of people" underscored the significance of the role white privilege plays in society. She spoke of privilege in a rural context and attributed farm ownership as a form of haves and have-nots. Melinda provided a historical example that has present-day implications:

*I suppose we could look at white privilege in our rural areas, as farm ownership. Many of our kids today in Southwest (STATE) here, very likely feel that their counterparts who were born into a farm have a privilege. They have many, many, many resources that kids who were born otherwise would not have, and that, in our part of the country, initially started with white privilege in the Homestead Act. Historically, I think what our kids are experiencing today in not having that family farm in their genetics would be an example of white privilege.*

This historical example aligns with the chronosystem, which notes the influence of social and historical events or circumstance that shape how individuals develop across their lifespan. Furthermore, Melinda expressed that white privilege made her angry. However, an internal conflict exists associated with white privilege and a desire to repudiate its existence. This conflict will be discussed in more detail under the subtheme of Desire to Deny Privilege.

Similarly, Suzi spoke of white privilege historically. She remarked she felt white privilege does exist and that it may never change. "In a broad sense, I do think white privilege exists, and I think it has for a very long time, and I don't know if it will ever go away." She continued:

*Just because...It just happened. For whatever reason, there were more white people in the United States and some other countries, and they kind of took over, and then, unfortunately, they brought slaves over and thought they could own people. That's really, really ruined the chances for an entire race of people here.*

Suzi believed the historical majority representation of whites has led to white privilege. Though she contextualized white privilege historically, she downplayed the role of colonization and decimation of the indigenous people of the United States. Suzi also immediately offered conflicting sentiments on white privilege as she recounted her experience and lack of benefitting from privilege. This retraction is discussed in the subtheme Desire to Deny Privilege.

Scarlett initiated the dialog on white privilege during the interview process. When asked about whether or not race played a role in her identity Scarlett noted that white privilege did play a role in her identity and it often went unseen. Scarlett expressed feelings of guilt associated with her white privilege. She also expressed an awareness that she was *“hypersensitive to seeing how that phrase can cause people to shut down.”* As the dialog progressed, Scarlett implicitly described white privilege as she discussed the achievement gap. She attributed poverty as the number one cause of the achievement gap but added, *“Not all of it (achievement gap), but a lot of it's explained by poverty. Which, of course, is inequitably experienced by people of different races....”*

She continued, *“Obviously what causes poverty...You dial that back, and you go back to housing policies and all that stuff that ingrained. So, poverty makes it so that schools aren't as well funded because schools are locally funded.”* The implication was that historically unfair housing practices have resulted in inequitable outcomes along racial lines and resulted in advantages for whites. Her views hinted at not only historical privilege but also systemic advantages that perpetuate white privilege.

Comparably, Suzi spoke of systemic advantages associated with inequitable outcomes. She described an activity her Latina college classmate facilitated as an assigned

persuasive writing project. In this account of the activity, she noted that some groups had a large number of marshmallows and toothpicks, while other groups had very few. She recalled:

*So, everybody's building these bonfires. Of course, some people had really huge ones on their desks, and some people had these little itty-bitty ones, depending on how many toothpicks and marshmallows they got. When we got done, she said I don't remember what school district she was from in (CITY). She said that her school district compared to all the others in the area, she was majoring in science, I think she wanted to go into medicine, their school didn't get any money for science. They didn't have beakers, they didn't have any of these certain kinds of test tubes, and she explained all the different materials they couldn't afford.*

Suzi noted that her classmate outlined funding for all of neighboring school districts that were predominantly white school districts. The Latina student outlined all of the supplies and funding that were available at the predominately white institutions because of property taxes. Suzi expressed that this was a vivid example of how established systems work. The example Suzi provided helped her understand how systemic privilege impacts access and equity across racial lines.

As each participant shared her beliefs on white privilege, we continued the dialog to include a substantive example of white privilege they had observed. The examples provided by each participant provided to be hypothetical scenarios. Judi described white privilege in terms of a Hispanic faculty member having to work harder to prove themselves after being hired. When pressed on whether or not this was an example she had actually observed, she stated, *"It's just that for instance. I can't really think of a specific example. I know it probably has happened."*

Similarly, Miriam and Scarlet provided hypothetical scenarios in reference to observed white privilege. Their descriptions nearly mirrored one another. Miriam stated:

*I'm absolutely aware that it's (white privilege) true. Especially being older I go into a store. No one follows me around, and I have brought that up to my students before. Have you ever had somebody follow (you) around a store? White, black, otherwise? And yes, they have. And yes, they resent it. I said 'Why do you suppose they do that?' Well, I said "So they're attributing you to a group that they have a stereotype about, and they're treating you in that way."*

The inference could be made that black and white students have different experiences based on stereotypes. This hypothetical scenario was presented to students in her class; however, when pressed on specific examples she had witnessed, she was not able to provide an example. She attributed not having an example to the propensity of the rural community to be artificially nice. The implication might be that overt discriminatory action, such as following a person of color around a store, likely would not happen in the PCC service area because they masked their bias with niceties.

Scarlett described a hypothetical scenario very similar to Miriam's example. She spoke of students of color being accused of shoplifting. When asked whether this was a specific experience a student had shared with her, Miriam indicated that none of her students had shared such an experience. She did not, however, mention that she had seen in the community Spanish-speaking patrons treated differently in stores than she has been treated. Both Miriam and Scarlett expressed shame and frustration with the existence of white privilege, yet they struggled to point to a specific example of white privilege that they had witnessed. This lack of evidence may explain Judi, Melinda, Suzi and William's desire to deny the existence or impact of white privilege.

### **Desire to deny privilege**

A compelling component of the theme Historical and Hypothetical Privilege was the propensity to want to deny privilege, even after having stated that it existed. Judi, Melinda,

and Suzi each acknowledged white privilege, yet they made statements that seemed to pull back or retract their acknowledgment. As noted, Judi provided a hypothetical example of a Hispanic faculty member having to prove themselves more so than a white faculty. Within this hypothetical scenario, she stated, *“I feel like we all have to jump through a certain amount of hoops.”* This retraction seemed to position the experience of minorities and whites on an equal playing field and undermine the notion of white privilege.

As she continued to describe the achievement gap, Judi emphasized the role of poverty and how there is a link in urban areas between poverty and race. Judi argued this happened despite race and ethnicity:

*I think that we have very successful people of all races and ethnicities, who have raised very successful children and that achievement gap...that achievement gap itself is not...Is there still white privilege in that? I'm certain that, that is still there, but they have similar opportunities support those types of things to get in there and legitimately be competitive and do very well.*

This description of the achievement gap suggested there might be equality in opportunity as evident in the success of individuals from all races and ethnicities. This statement undermined the white privilege construct in that it was contrary to the concept of unearned advantages that whites receive. This narrative suggests an achieved white racial consciousness with a conflictive typology (Rowe et al., 1994). WRCM suggests that whites who recognize the priority of just treatment for all and attribute inequitable outcomes to individual choice or motivation, often experience a conflict of egalitarian and individualistic views. (Rowe et al.). Moreover, the influence on the macrosystem and the rural cultural expectations of hard work to create opportunity legitimized the view that hard work leads to equal opportunity.

Melinda shared views similar to Judi's understanding of white privilege and the availability of opportunities to be successful. As she reflected on the term white privilege and contextualized it as an extreme view, while simultaneously acknowledging that it does exist, Melinda noted:

*I guess, one of the phrases my mom always used is, 'That we get the opportunity to bloom where we're planted, and some of us are planted in different types of soils, so what makes it harder and easier, depending upon the water, and the sunlight, and the soil, and all those kinds of things'. Part of me wants to go on to one side and say, 'White privilege makes me angry,' and a part of me wants to go to the other side and deny that it exists. But the reality is that it's probably somewhere in the middle of all of that.*

These conflicting views on white privilege also played out for Suzi, who described her college enrollment process in the following way: "Then when I went to apply for college, it felt to me like whites got no privilege because you had to be some other ethnicity to get any kind of advantage for scholarships." Then she remarked, "*For a lot of my life I felt like it was kind of the opposite, just an uneducated person. To a lot of people, it kind of feels like it's the opposite. A lot of times the advantage kind of goes the other way, so it kind of goes both ways.*" The inherent conflict in her dialog created confusion and may be reflective of a desire to deny the privilege because she had not recognized any personal benefits associated with white privilege. Additionally, leaving the rural environment, entering the college setting, and not being awarded scholarship only further validated Suzi's conflictive views. The reinforcement of lack of advantage across systems may further crystalize the notion that white privilege does not exist.

Scarlett, who appraised herself as being open to other people's perspectives, summed her perspective on how rural whites viewed white privilege:

*I can see where people are coming from when they say that it's hard for working class, poor, folks to understand white privilege. I feel like I've read*



*enough and seen enough to know that, yes it does exist. And, as bad as your life is right now, imagine if you were black and you were experiencing the same economic circumstances, you'd be worse off. So, I guess, I believe it, I feel it, I know it happens. Especially now that you're aware of it.*

Her reflection speaks of how rural whites have seen other rural, poor whites struggle. This struggle may be seen as proof that white privilege does not exist because the rural community has seen white people who are disadvantaged.

Similarly, William, who denied the existence of white privilege, noted the following:

*I think it's become a convenient cover to help explain so-called success of the majority of the population or a good chunk of it, I won't even say the majority because I know a hell of a lot of so-called whites that are going absolutely nowhere, so I don't know where their privilege is getting them.*

Regardless of the degree in which participants believed or denied white privilege, it was clear that the concept evoked emotional responses in a historical, hypothetical and present-day context. The connection between participants' emotional response and their historical examples are further discussed during the analytic discussion and will be explained using theoretical construct.

## **Students as teachers**

### **Students as cultural informants**

Each of the female participants in the study spoke of how the diversity of students informed their teaching and other students. Judi noted that she used to view diversity as primarily about race, but the more she was around students she realized diversity was about much more than race. She described how diversity of geographic origin as one of the most significant factors impacting her campus. Judi also spoke of students challenging her as they became more comfortable in the classroom when they started to see the world differently than she described. She described students speaking up and saying:

*Judi, you're wrong. That's not what it's like. That's all right. That's all right, and they become good at talking about some of their experiences that they've had. How things are different in different parts of the world, and so as the students come in and can give that real-life experience to what we're talking about, then that makes everybody go, 'Oh, yeah' ".*

Similarly, Melinda capitalized on the diverse backgrounds of her students and was intentional in her instruction to encourage students to interact with one another. She described an increased awareness of diversity and how she had intentionally incorporated informal dialog into her classroom to enable students to become more culturally aware. Melinda did not consider herself a haughty instructor because she believed some of the most valuable learning experiences come from the interactions between students within the classroom. Melinda's beliefs were put into practice and observed during the field observation, where students were randomly assigned workgroups and allowed to shared thoughts and perspectives. This instructional style may suggest that the influence of the microsystem, or personal relationships, is an influential factor that was taken into consideration in Melinda's instructional techniques. She created opportunities for students to get to know one another as a form of development and knowledge acquisition.

Miriam also engaged in informal conversation during the field observation. She spoke at length in front of the class with a student who participated in competitive rodeos. She greeted each student as they entered the classroom in a personal manner. As each student described their various experiences, other students chimed in with questions. She also randomly assigned students to work in groups during her class to enable the students to get to know one another. Miriam allowed time for this informal dialog because she believed it was essential, particularly for the students from rural areas. She noted that she thinks it is critically important for rural students to get to know people from different places. Miriam

felt that these students often perceived that everyone sees the world in the ways they do, so she provided opportunities in her classroom for insight and perspectives from people with different walks of life.

Scarlett and Suzi spoke of students as cultural informants in a slightly different manner; however, the spirit of their experiences aligned with their colleagues. Scarlett stated:

*I try to do better and be better. In general, I think, what I've worked on over the years is just being more...letting my students-trying to be a lot more interested in what they have to say. Then being able to work that into course objectives rather than be more authoritative and talk down.*

Scarlett noted that PCC was the most culturally diverse experience students could have in their town because of the lack of diversity. She referred to PCC as “*a window to a wider world*” because students from the rural community will be spending time with, living with and playing sports with young adults from all over the world. Consistent with her peers, Scarlett utilized the classroom and PCC’s campus as a center of influence by allowing students to have meaningful and relevant experiences within their course. This approach suggests that PCC and classrooms at PCC may represent a setting within the mesosystem that provides an opportunity to significantly influence students and their development.

Similarly, Suzi stated that diversity made the campus and community better. She noted her experience with diverse students, “*I've learned a lot more from students who are different from me and different from other students whom I've had in the past than they have learned from me... (I have) learned a lot more from them. I'm sure the people around them have, too.*” Suzi remarked that she learned a lot about linguistics from student vernacular and from English language learners that had inspired her to consider pursuing her doctorate degree.

Suzi expressed a teaching style that engages and supports collaborative learning. When considering diversity and how it has impacted how she teaches she stated, *“I’m trying to think if I’ve ever had to actually do actual research. I haven’t really. I’ve really kind of let the student be my guide for the most part.”* This approach applied to her willingness to learn from students about their culture, how they experience the world and their learning styles.

### **Self-reflection and student-centered teaching**

When considering the diversity of the student population and the various needs their students have, a theme that emerged among the participants was self-reflection and student-centered teaching. As previously noted, Judi expressed an openness to being corrected by her students when they felt their worldviews and experiences differed from how she presented material. She engaged in open dialog during the class observation as they discussed how parenting was the same or different than it was fifty years ago. Early in the conversation with students, she noted: “You all may have different beliefs.” Her tone and delivery invited a dialog that allowed for differences of opinions and resulted in students sharing personal experiences.

Judi made references throughout our interviews to experiences that influenced her beliefs and habits as an instructor. She noted:

*My biggest influence on my belief, actually, is my faith, and so that's the biggest factor. I would also say, of course, just life experiences, and getting to know wonderful, interesting people of all types of backgrounds and colors. That's done a lot. Just the more you know people, the more you realize it's not about background or skin color, it's just about them.*

Her attempts to get to know students through her teaching helped her make connections, which she valued. It also helped her provide relevant material to the class. This practice was

similar to Scarlett's strategy of incorporating relevant content to her course objectives based on student input. When describing her pedagogy, Judi stated, *"It does make a difference in how people teach, and so I, as far as my pedagogy, I really try to focus on where people are at developmentally."* She went on to say, *"So I try to demonstrate a wide variety of teaching strategies for them. Always going from that we have to know where people are at developmentally, and I try to involve a lot of classroom activity."*

Similar to Judi, Melinda reflected on her experience in college and, based on these experiences, she believed instructors wield power and influence. She reflected at length on her transformative college experiences, and how she sought to bring these types of experiential learning opportunities to the college. Her previous college experiences that had shaped her teaching style have led to valuing connections and relationships with students. Melinda stated the following as she reflected on her role in the institution and working with students: *"I guess I really try to see that I respect their passion and try to promote it, and get to know my students within the institution, not just within my classroom."* Melinda, Scarlett, and Suzi's repeated references to their collegiate experiences reinforced the influence of the mesosystem and how the college setting had molded their worldview and pedagogy.

During the field observation, Melinda used a collaborative learning environment that encouraged students to work together to inform one another about the material being covered. She challenged her students to engage with one another as a method of engaging in the context. This collaborative approach positioned students as teachers and was a less authoritative approach to deliver content. Melinda noted the following on her pedagogical practices: *"I will tell you some of my students some days are really uncomfortable with the*

*small group stuff or the weird activities I have them do, but I think ultimately they end up finding that it's a place for them to just try out new things."*

Similar to Melinda, both Scarlett and Suzi reflected on their previous educational experiences in college and identified these moments as critical in establishing how they taught, and students learned. Scarlett reflected on how transformative leaving her conservative, highly religious childhood was, and how entering college caused her to reconsider previous established beliefs. She drew upon these experiences as she created a student-centered learning environment. Scarlett stated the importance of providing students relevant and engaging material that will be of importance to them in their future. She went on to describe methods she used to allow for student choice in their education process and assignment completion. She noted:

*I also very much believe in having some flexibility in writing topics where students can write about stuff they care about and stuff that's important, while still having some boundaries drawn around it. Because too much choice can also make students feel writer's block and paralysis, but giving them some choice to write about things they care about.*

Suzi spoke of her reliance on students to guide her instruction. She stated the following about her experience with her students:

*I've really kind of let the students be my guide for the most part. Because they're really good at that. If I'm not doing something right or I'm....If I'm feeling like I'm not reaching any students for some reason, I just try something different, or I try to attack the problem if there's a problem in a different way, and if that doesn't work, then I try another method, and that seems to work.*

Suzi relied on student experiences and student outcomes to drive her instruction. Her willingness to consider her instructional technique and pivot if she felt students were not learning was demonstrative of her self-reflection and student-centered teaching.

In the spirit of student-centeredness, Miriam used practices that allow for student choice. She reflected on her early career experiences and how her value of representation impacted how she taught. Miriam noted allowing students to have a degree of independence in what they choose to write about in their assignments. She stated, *“I learn a lot about my students from what they write about. I often use that in how I approach them individually.”* She also shared how she had a history of integrating diversity into student choice. She stated the following when reflecting on practice as an educator, *“Gosh, young adult novels really came into their own in the 80s and 90s and they weren't all dystopian like they seem to be today. When I did that, I made sure that out of eight books that I required, half of them had male protagonists and half had female.”*

She went on further to note, *“I’ve been something of a rebel since my early days. Nowadays, without labeling my classes multicultural and stuff like that, I do try to bring in writers from a lot of different worlds of influence. Latino, black, indigenous peoples.”* She added that she did this in an attempt to address the various needs and experiences of students.

Each of the female participants in the study reflected on their experiential learning through early career experiences and experiences as students in college that had shaped how they currently instructed. In some instances, they were seeking to emulate previous influential figures, while in others they pulled from valuable experiences that shaped how they viewed the world to inform their pedagogical practice. Moreover, they incorporated student voice and choice into their curriculum and demonstrated a willingness to be flexible when considering student needs to ensure students are learning.

### **Athletes: The epicenter of racial diversity**

The final subtheme under students as teachers was related to student-athletes as diversity representatives. Each of the participants, except William, referenced diversity in the context of the student-athlete experience. Many of the references to student-athletes provided insight into how diversity has been understood and operationalized at PCC.

Judi first referenced student-athletes when asked about the institution's commitment to diversity. She noted that the college was open, and she did not feel there was an undercurrent of bias; however, she later noted the following about athletes, specifically basketball players:

*So I have a responsibility to recognize my own bias, and you know what, actually, I talk actively to my students about that. That we all have bias and stereotypes, and it's your job to recognize what yours are. It is your job to recognize whatever that is, and we have a lot of athletes on campus, and it's my job to recognize that the bias that exists, therefore, let's say the basketball team, and not doing their work. That's a stereotype because I've had a lot of really good basketball players in class. I've also had some that screw around, but the ones that screw around do not reflect the entire team, and so just that idea of one person does not make the culture. It does not make a race.*

The implication of the previous statement coupled with the field observation was that PCC's athletes were a primary example upon which stereotypes of black males have been built. Although this was not explicitly stated, a review of the roster of the website showed a disproportionate representation of African American men when compared to the general campus demographics. Further, this comment ran counter to her initial assessment of the institution regarding there was no undercurrent of bias.

Athletes as the epicenter of race and ethnicity was further solidified as Melinda described her experiences as a student PCC. She noted:

*...my exposure to ethnicity as diversity came right here at (Parcard) Community College, and honestly it was in bringing athletes to our campus*



*that wanted to continue. And at that point, it was all basketball. They went on to continue into basketball, so my world was opened.*

Based on these comments and Melinda's description of how students from small towns still have to come to PCC to experience diversity for the first time implied that these diverse encounters were primarily because of the student-athlete populations, which have expanded since she was a student at PCC. These sentiments underscored the role of mesosystem and its influence on the development of worldviews. Although the faculty discussed the impact of the setting of PCC and the role of student-athletes as expanding their peers' perspective, it became clear that the environmental setting of the campus was intentionally made ripe for cross-cultural interactions.

Suzi was much more explicit about the role that student-athletes played in building diversity at PCC. She noted, *"The most diversity that we seem to have at our college are the athletes."* Notably, Suzi did not speak of the athletes in terms of bias or stereotypes; rather, she noted the value they added to the college climate. As she reflected on how diversity has impacted the community college, she stated:

*I think these people that I've had have been amazing, and they show up in the community college. They wouldn't be there if they weren't athletes, at least not the ones in my school, and they bring so much more to the classroom than they probably get in my opinion, but maybe they feel like they get a lot. It's so good for those students who have been kind of mired down out here and then in western (State) high schools, and these non-diverse high schools can have these students from all over come in and share. I mean, they're anywhere from, yeah, Africa to inner-city Houston to Denver or wherever.*

At times, the word athlete was used interchangeably for African America. It was understood that the athletics departments are responsible for the recruitment and awarding of scholarships to the minority and international student-athletes. Suzi described having

minimal diversity her previous teaching experience, noting she had only one student of color in her school during her formative education in PCC's service area:

*For example, even at STATE UNIVERSITY, there weren't very many African American students in my class. There were some athletes. I tutored the athletic department there, but I minored in linguistics, and so we did a lot of study of Ebonics and stuff. Which all came rushing back when I got my first class of athletes, and then they came in, and I couldn't understand half of what they were saying. I'm not saying that they're always using Ebonics.*

Because of limited exposure to African Americans, it became apparent the term athlete had become racialized among the participants as demonstrated in these aforementioned statements.

Similarly, Miriam described her experience with student-athletes in explicit terms. She noted, *"My students of color are usually either from another country or an athlete from another part of our country."* She described this in the context of how her colleagues formed stereotypes of student-athletes at PCC. Miriam described athletes who were not academically prepared for the rigors of college. She also described her colleagues' experiences at PCC with athletes. She attributed their lack of preparedness to being advanced through their education because they were star athletes and athletics was their "ticket" out of their community. Miriam described behavioral and etiquette issues in the classroom that upset instructors. What Miriam described was a culture clash and stereotypes that have been attributed to student-athletes. This description aligned with Judy's comments regarding biases and stereotypes of basketball players as not being as committed or focused on their education.

Lastly, Scarlett spoke about her concerns about how the connection to diversity was limited to the student-athletes. She noted, *"I do worry sometimes about the way our college is structured with regards to diversity and that almost all of the black students at this college*

are athletes.” She went on to further state somewhat conflicted feelings about the student-athlete experience:

*I feel like, in a way, sometimes that's good because a lot of these students are getting good education for free and they go on to do nice things with their transfer and gain power in society and do good in all of that. But, I almost feel like sometimes it recirculates stereotypes about black people being athletes, you know.*

Scarlett's description further explained how the term athlete had become racialized and she appeared to be conflicted about the overrepresentation of minorities, specifically blacks, in her college's athletic programs. She went on to express concerns that there was fine line in athletics, in general, that may be somewhat exploitive. She wanted to make sure the students are not seen as entertainment that packs the school gymnasium on game night but as human beings. Scarlett demonstrated awareness of racial issues was consistent with an achieved status in WRCM. Her awareness of sociopolitical issues and her ability to clearly express concerns without harboring guilt are aligned with an integrative typology.

Ultimately, each of the female participants' descriptions, when considered collectively, reflected a campus whose racial diversity has been driven by athletics. The diversity of this student population was seen to have value to the extent that they [athletes] were informing the faculty and other students who have had limited exposure to diversity. However, a consequence of student-athletes, in effect, representing black culture, maybe crystalizing stereotypes of this culture.

## **Outlier**

According to Miles et al. (2014), the outlier can be your friend. The irony of this statement will be further explored in my autoethnography in Chapter 6. It is important to note that William, an opponent of diversity, was considered a deviant case among his peers.

His stated resentment of diversity and self-identification as a “contrarian” boded well with the literature on white racial consciousness. This aspect of William’s narrative will be shared later in Chapter 5 under the research question section. For now, William will be viewed from a data analysis perspective that considered participants who have the most to gain or lose by participating in the study and denying his belief in the value of diversity (Miles et al., 2014). Below William’s narrative summary is representative of his values and beliefs.

William was noted as sharing thematic alignment with participants in the study to the extent that specific topics and issues arise as relevant to the common understanding of diversity; however, William’s adamant views on diversity as propaganda made him stand out among the data set. William relied heavily on a race-based understanding of diversity that he staunchly rejected. A rejection of the racial descriptor of “white” was established early in the data collection process. Initially and repeatedly, William pointed to his complexion as the reason he rejected the term white. William considered himself to be rather dark complexed. He also noted that, if words such as red and yellow (historically attributed to Native American and Asians, respectively) are no longer acceptable, neither should white and black be acceptable or used. William perceived the use of the terms white and black were strategically being used as propaganda to put people against each other. After further communication, he noted that he also rejected the term Caucasian because it lacked accuracy because he was not a descendant of the Caucasus Mountains. His reliance on examples related to race would suggest that, despite his rejection of the “propaganda” he felt was perpetuated through diversity dialog, he had consciously or unconsciously ascribed to the rhetoric he detested. Faculty typically define diversity using the legally protected status as outlined by EEO (Baker et al., 2016). In this case, William had operationalized diversity to

mean primarily race and ethnicity, more specifically blacks and whites. This became evident in his reflection on his past and present experience with diversity. Two of his past examples of experiences with diversity will be further expounded upon later in this chapter. However, when asked about the diversity of his student population and whether or not this diversification had caused him to consider changes to his teaching approaches, William noted:

*No. Don't need to. I'll give you an example. Of course, I teach both components of American History, early American through the Civil War; and, then usually it's post- Civil War or Reconstruction till now for the modern component. Well, up till the Civil War I think you'd be a derogate historian if you did not spend plenty of time on slavery as part of the American experience. So, I've always done this. I will continue to do this because it just seems to be intellectually honest to deal with slavery in the midst of the American experience. So, I'm not sure what I would even need to do.*

The sociohistorical reference to slavery and the reconstruction period are examples of the use of the chronosystem to influence attitudes and understanding. While these references may have been influential for William it was unclear if these examples were influential for the students in the context of diversity dialog, particularly if they were not connected to modern-day implications.

As previously noted, diversity encompasses many factors that extend beyond race and ethnicity. The forcible dominance of the Native American is documented in American History, although during the field observation mention of the disease and the indigenous' weak immune system appeared to be overstated when considering the violence the natives endured during the colonization of the Americas. Furthermore, women had minimal rights during the colonization of America. Nevertheless, the emphasis on diversity was placed on the African American experience as a slave in William's description of diversity in his content area. It is important to note, the primary text for this course was written from a white

male historian perspective, which was uncovered during the document review. Of value to the diversity dialog may be the perspective of other marginalized populations during time periods addressed previously. While a supplemental reading list was available on William's website, no required readings that included a diversity of racial, ethnic or gender perspective were required. William's supplemental reading list was divided into categories that addressed various diverse groups (women, African Americans, Native Americans, etc.) and was used as a referral when students had specific inquiries or were deliberate in seeking another perspective for an assignment. This supplemental reading list is representative of a pedagogical practice that supports the inclusion of diverse perspectives; however, none of these readings were required for students whom William described as having "*no clue literally*." These students with limited exposure or "no clue" were required to read a text written by a white male. The lack of diverse perspective may reinforce the experiences of the "young generation" who, according to other study participants, have had limited exposure to people who are different from them, and this white male perspective may not create the cognitive dissonance as discussed previously that fosters critical thinking. Furthermore, it was unclear if the media forms being used to connect with students, specifically literature or textbooks, had as much impact as the mass media or social media of Bronfenbrenner's exosystem.

William's descriptive of his students having limited knowledge and experience or "no clue" is not unique. Scarlett, Miriam, and Suzi all hinted at the inexperience, lack of historical or cultural context, or lack of ability to contextualize their place in the world and higher education due to their youth and/or first-generation status. Despite the naivete that students bring into their college experience, all of the study participants, except William,

shared the common theme of a willingness to learn from students and the experiences they brought to the classroom, particularly from a cultural perspective. This was evident in their participatory pedagogical practices, whereas William embraced a lecture-based approach. This lectured based approach can be best described as one-way communication with periodic checks for understanding and no interactivity. During an hour and thirty-minute field observation, William presented material verbally, he wrote on the whiteboard four to five keywords or phrases, and a student first spoke one hour and twenty-two minutes into the lecture. William utilized a map that he mentioned the administration would prefer he discontinue using, and there were no technologies implemented (i.e., PowerPoint, video, audio, overhead projection, etc.).

The pedagogical practices William exhibited may be best understood when the comments from his interview are taken into consideration. William recounted an experience as a junior in college when his instructor verbally reprimanded him in front of his classmates. William noted that he had worked hard and studied diligently to do well on the exam but he did not do as well as he had expected. He went on to recall his professor's comments, "*What do you think you're doing? This is trash. Blah, blah.*" William noted that he questioned whether he was fit to continue at that institution. As he reflected on an incident that happened nearly forty years prior, he noted that today a situation like this would never occur. In his account, William mentioned discussing this with a person who currently worked at his alma mater. She noted, and William agreed that behavior like what he experienced would be considered bullying whereas now instructors are concerned with befriending students. William noted that the latter behavior was not good for students' growth. The inference from this dialog was the former experience of humiliation or what would be termed "bullying" in

modern day context was a more appropriate approach to educating students. William noted that he was an “*oddball*” in that he did not make friends with his students, yet William explained he was “*highly respected, I can assure you of that.*” Based on William’s experience, it appears he may have perceived students learn through being challenged by authority. Furthermore, the influence of the microsystem, or personal relationships was not something utilized as a strategy to engage his students. This was contrary to the other participants in the study who shared experiences with their previous faculty who mentored and modeled behaviors for them as a form of influence that shaped their current teaching.

William’s authoritative pedagogical approach was not unlike my pilot study participant from summer 2017. The descriptor of authoritative relates more to command and self-confidence and is not intended to imply a demand for obedience. William and the pilot study participants were both trained attorneys who implicitly and explicitly noted that they pulled from their previous educational experiences to inform their teaching strategies. They believed in the practices that resonated with them during their collegiate experience and tried to bring those to the classroom. This “sage on stage” approach was not representative of the majority of the faculty at PCC. Of particular significance was the lack of consideration for how the multiplicity of student identities impacts how students best learn. As cultural references were used in William’s classroom, students appeared not to connect with his jokes and references. While making personal connections in the form of friendship may not be a priority for William, culturally relevant or culturally inclusive pedagogical practices did not appear to be relevant as well.

It is worth noting the lack of racial diversity within the course observed. William’s was the only course I observed that had representation only from white students. William



made comments that implied he had been called a bigot or a racist because of his objections and resentment of the implementation of the diversity agenda. It was unclear if these derogatory remarks came from students or his peers, but one cannot help but wonder if students have formed opinions of William that included racism or bigotry. Consistent with the conflictive typology of WRCM, William had carefully constructed his position as to not appear to be blatantly racist, yet his attitude toward policy or practices that impact the power he wielded from his whiteness had a negative valence.

**“I’ve transcended this thing called race years and years ago.”**

As noted, William relied heavily on race-related examples during his interviews. Further, William was the only study participant who sent me literature he cited that solidified his position. Two of the three articles provided were race related. The other article dealt more specifically with the ambiguity of the term diversity. Nevertheless, William’s emphasis on diversity as a matter of race was continuously exemplified throughout the data collection process. He spoke of his experience in Watts during the Civil Rights movement and his assistance with the rebuilding of a black church and, more specifically, he addressed in detail his experience with his college roommate and this room assignment process. William noted:

*Before it (diversity) was a buzzword I had an African American roommate in college. That at the time was a big deal. This was back in the 70s. To me it was no big deal because of my background and to my African American roommate, he didn’t think it was a big deal either, but they (the Deans) had to call us in, sit us down and question us. ‘Would you be okay having a white or black roommate?’ Well, yeah. Big deal. It was interesting. It was a good experience for both of us, but it was a bit of an eye-opener on my campus as well.*

William’s personal experience and growing up in racially and ethnically diverse geographical regions in the United States seemed to have shaped his views on diversity as a reasonable expectation. He felt strongly the homogeneity of the rural Midwest was abnormal

and, because of his rich and diverse cultural upbringing, he represented “*walking culture*” at PCC. He was adamant that forcing the diversity agenda created confusion because of the lack of clear definition and resentment because whites, particularly white men relegated to “*being at the butt end of it (diversity). It is not amusing at all.*”

### **Diversity and its conflict with meritocracy**

The crux of William's opposition to what he termed “*the d-word*” diversity, appeared to lie in his perception that diversity was in opposition to merit. William recounted numerous career opportunities that evaded him due to the diversity agenda. He alluded to missed opportunities because he did not meet the diverse hire requirements. He stated, “*If I wanted to push my own credentials on all of this race agenda business, I could blow people right out of the water.*” The concept of personal merit and William's views on the social engineering regarding the concept of diversity were consistent throughout communication with William. He referred to diversity as a threat to individual merit in admissions decisions for colleges and universities. He provided a detailed description of a specific hiring scenario in the late 1990s for a position he was not selected for in his reflection journal. The description of his experience was quite telling. He noted:

*The search committee was made up of a Latino female, an African American female, an American Indian, and a very Caucasian administrative dean. Very “diverse.” Remarkably, I was the darkest person in the room; but, I was a “White” male, and the body language in the room was clearly against my candidacy- even though nobody could possibly challenge my academic credentials or academic background and pedagogical experience.*

William continued to describe how he informed the committee of his willingness to teach their Ethnic Studies course. He described a deafening silence that overtook the room, followed by a confrontation that included rolling his shirt sleeve, pointing to his skin and asking the committee, “*Is this the reason you are reluctant to say anything?*” He reflected

on this experience and his subsequent rejection as a result of the state's new "*diversity*" position, and he described the institution and its hiring practices as bigoted. The aforementioned job interview was referenced among a series of job interviews followed by rejections that William had experienced since the early 1990s. The inference made regarding the nature of his description of inequity in hiring practices, inequity in college admissions and the timeframe of the incidents referenced aligned with federal legislation associated with affirmative action (Day, 1989). William's experiences with rejection during the hiring process may have shaped his opposition to diversity. His resentment and anger toward "*the d-word*" cannot be understated. However, as a person who prided himself on being logical in his argument, he noted "*Educationally, when I get very philosophical about this, it's actually a good thing for me (on the lack of fairness in his interview processes) because I can say to myself, 'Aha, this is what so many African Americans have had to deal with for so long.'*" This argument exemplifies the conflictive status in the WRCM. William's principles of fairness were apparent while the rejection of efforts to remediate the inequity that existed from discrimination was staunchly rejected because this would include the sharing of power.

### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to share the voices of the study participants. The narrative of the participants was pivotal in finding meaning relative the research questions. Illuminating white faculty members experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs, served as the foundation for understanding how each faculty fit within their institution and how they understood diversity. Chapter 5 provides a detailed examination of these experiences and connects their narrative to the research questions and scholarly literature, where appropriate.

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION**

The participants in this study provided insight into their experience with diversity as white faculty members in a rural community college setting. The participants' backgrounds, beliefs, and values reflect their attitudes toward diversity at PCC and in the communities served by PCC. The experiences of Judi, Melinda, Miriam, Scarlett, Suzi, and William expanded my understanding of how diversity is experienced in the classroom through dialog and curriculum. Furthermore, these experiences provided an opportunity to examine practices that support and hinder understanding and appreciation of the changing demographics rural communities are experiencing.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The data from this study uncovered that PCC does, in general, have a stated commitment to the concept of diversity, yet some obstacles may be prohibiting this institution from operationalizing their stated commitment. The faculty in this study are overwhelmingly in support of diversity and the value it brings to an educational environment. Although he considered himself a contrarian in this study, even William recognized that he adds value because of his diverse experiences outside of the PCC area. However, this appreciation did not extend to the diverse student population that he serves. Experiences, beliefs, and attitudes played a role in how the study participants conceptualized diversity. The following themes emerged in this study based on these experiences and conceptualizations: (1) Feeling Othered; (2) Operationalizing Diversity; (3) Historical and Hypothetical Privilege; and (4) Students as Teacher. These themes illustrated how white faculty described their perceptions of diversity. Using White Racial Consciousness Model (WRCM) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development model as a conceptual

framework for analysis, this section provides a review of the data related specifically to the research questions, the theoretical construct and, where applicable, related literature.

**Research Question 1: How do white faculty members' backgrounds influence their perception of diversity?**

Diversity is a socially constructed concept that is also shaped by individual experiences and knowledge (Smith, 2015). The shared experience of being in a rural community college, being Caucasian, and being a faculty member are common traits among the participants in this study; however, their backgrounds and beliefs have shaped their perceptions of diversity. The women in the study expressed an attitude of diversity advocacy. This is consistent with findings by Park and Denson (2009) that women are more likely to have attitudes that align with diversity advocacy. Women who represent a historically marginalized group may be more inclined to note a commitment to diversity based on their experiences as members of a marginalized group. The remaining traits are discussed in further detail and expounded upon as related to literature and theory.

***Feeling Othered***

Overwhelmingly, the participants in the study who were not born and raised in the rural communities served by PCC described their experience with diversity differently than those participants who were native to the community college's service area. For these participants, the homogeneity of PCC and the surrounding community was unfamiliar despite the many years each participant had already lived and worked in PCC's community. They described a community comprised of individuals who are disconnected from the realities of the larger world outside of their location and spoke of the natives of the community in a manner that implied conservatism, narrow-mindedness, and limited experiential learning because of the homogeneity of PCC's rural communities. Miriam and Scarlett perceived this

“othered” status appeared to bring with it an appreciation for those who have a diverse background and an understanding that the students who come to PCC with diverse backgrounds (i.e., race, ethnicity, urban) have experiences that can be valuable to the classroom experience for students and the faculty. William juxtaposed his rural community experience and his background that included regular interactions with racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity against one another. His formative years included an abundance of culture, causing him to view diversity as “normal” and rural homogeneity as somewhat abnormal. His previous regular interactions with diverse groups and individuals with varied worldviews caused William to feel that diversity has become an “agenda” that is forced on people and is a threat to first amendment rights. Nevertheless, he still placed value on his diverse background.

Conversely, the participants in the study who were from the rural communities of PCC shared an appreciation of diversity; however, they relied on students and previous experiences from professional development and their college experiences in shaping these views. Essentially, diversity for rural born study participants was viewed as a commodity that has been brought into PCC (i.e., speakers, student activities, student-athletes) or an experience that happened outside of PCC’s communities (online resources, professional development attendance, college attendance).

### ***Nondominant Political Views***

Park and Denson (2009) noted that individuals with liberal political views are more likely to have attitudes that support diversity advocacy. These findings held true in this study, particularly for Miriam and Scarlett. Miriam and Scarlett, who expressed feelings of not fitting in, both shared experiences of down-playing or masking their political affiliations

to avoid being ostracized. They also expressed fear of losing creditability or fear of retribution associated with strong liberal political views. Flynn et al. (2017) found that educators often lose their identity due to more prohibitive pedagogical concepts. Although PCC had not imposed standards that limit freedom of expression of political views, the sentiments associated with feeling othered suggest that instructors with nondominant political views exercise discretion related to politics in the classroom. William described the communities served by PCC as being conformist and do not question authority. If William's views are an accurate reflection, they may explain why participants with liberal views mask their political positions. Having nondominant political views may shape faculty appreciation of diversity to the extent that they have a lived experience that may be similar to members of nondominant cultures.

### ***Spirituality and Civic Engagement***

Judi and Melinda shared that their faith was a foundational element in how they approached their personal and professional lives. Faculty who indicated a high degree of spirituality were more inclined to be diversity advocates (Park & Denson, 2009). The findings from this study aligned with findings revealed by Park and Denson. Additionally, both Miriam and Scarlett shared information related to their religious and spiritual upbringing; however, they noted they no longer actively engaged in the religious aspects of their upbringing. When considering Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Model (EHDM), the environmental setting or systems of their childhood may not be wholly lost and may play a role in shaping their diversity views. The exposure Miriam and Scarlett had with spirituality may have influenced their diversity advocacy. Although their experiences with spirituality may be more distal from to their core beliefs than those of Judi

and Melinda, the experiences may still be impacting their overall perception of diversity. The varied levels of effect across and within systems in EHDM are not definitive (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). One cannot identify with certainty which systems have the most substantial effect or have staying power.

Miriam and Scarlett also emphasized their commitment to their political views and demonstrated a commitment to encouraging students to engage at the local, state and national political level. Civic engagement aligns with diversity advocacy attitudes (Parks & Denson, 2009). Miriam and Scarlett's sincere belief in the value of civic engagement appears to parallel Judi and Melinda strong spiritual beliefs.

Ecological influences that emerged as themes across the participants were related to educational influences. The experience of higher education and the indelible mark of the stated cognitive dissonance experienced by challenges to core beliefs while in college is representative of the impact the mesosystem or setting has on individuals. Melinda, Suzi, Scarlett, and William each pointed to specific collegiate experiences that helped shape how they saw the world as teachers. Melinda, Suzi, and Scarlett spoke of cross-cultural experiences that caused them to see the world differently than they had before college. Faculty were at the root of the experiences that shaped their views of diversity. This finding might suggest that the relationship or interactions in the microsystem are significant in shaping diversity perceptions. The cognitive dissonance the study participants experienced when entering college caused them to consider emulating specific teaching style or techniques. These experiences have shaped their understanding of their purpose in educating college students and coincide with Bowman (2010) which suggests cognitive dissonance experienced by college students who encounter people or ideas that challenge their previous



ways of thinking experience more significant gains in diversity appreciation. The data indicated that Melinda, Suzi, and Scarlett sought to provide opportunities for cognitive dissonance to advance their students' understanding of various worldviews. Flynn et al. (2017) suggested the quality of teaching is identified in an instructor's ability to create rich learning experiences that challenge the students' way of thinking. Excluding William, the student-centered teaching techniques demonstrated at PCC allowed for input from students and subtle incorporation of opportunities for students to be challenged related to diversity.

### ***Summary***

Of particular importance to white faculty in a rural setting is whether or not an individual is considered as a "local". What can be surmised from the data is the role of rural-born ideology and the desire to find likeminded faculty who espouse the same value system. These findings suggest that the macrosystem, or overarching cultural norms in the PCC community, have a direct influence on how relationships are formed and people with diverse worldviews are embraced. Furthermore, the homogeneity of the rural community can be alarming to outsiders and plays a role in one's appreciation of diversity. For those faculty who are native to a rural setting, diversity appears to be a commodity that has value and is imported. This analogy has become increasingly relevant when considering the student-athlete population who are often scholarship recipients.

Political views, a significant factor in rural ideology, are also influential background factors that shape perceptions of diversity. Study participants with nondominant political views (Miriam, Scarlett, and William) appeared to agree that diversity adds value, although the participants varied to the extent that they viewed students with diverse backgrounds added value to the educational environment. This variation may be due in large part to

William's teacher-centered pedagogical style, which was inconsistent with the other study participants.

Spirituality and civic engagement were also influential factors in how study participants conceptualized diversity as it relates to advocacy. Miriam and Scarlett expressed a deep commitment to civic engagement and referenced religion and spirituality as part of their upbringing. Judi and Melinda expressed an earnest commitment to their spirituality that shaped how they currently live their lives. These values stood out as elements that participants expressed steadfast commitment to and passion for in the study. The values also correlated with diversity advocacy.

Lastly, previous collegiate experiences had a significant impact on how diversity perceptions were shaped. Participants in the study referred to how they came to understand diversity and experienced diversity in their educational experiences. These experiences not only shaped how they viewed diversity but also, in many instances, the educational experiences were guided by influential faculty. These experiences and relationships with faculty were important factors in how study participants approach their teaching. These findings suggest that the educational setting, the mesosystem, and the relationships formed in that setting (microsystem) have long-term lingering impact on how diversity views are formed and operationalized.

### **Research Question 2: How do white faculty in rural community colleges define diversity?**

The unanimous sentiment was that defining diversity was a difficult task. Each participant either addressed this question with pause, doubt, or acknowledgment that a single definition was elusive (MacDonald & Bernardo, 2005). Consistent with Baker et al. (2016), the protected status designated by EEO were most often referenced. In their initial definition

of diversity, race was the only element that nearly all participants included in the first rendering of a definition or explanation of diversity. Suzi did not include race as a diversity element in her definition.

Despite not defining diversity, William did provide an example of a failed interview where he felt his expression of his understanding of diversity lacked appreciation because of his race. From his perspective, the responses he offered seemingly lacked credibility with his audience due to his race. William's responses aligned with my presupposition that white faculty may avoid diversity dialog because they feel they lack the authority to speak on diversity as white people. William's perception that only people of color are credited with understanding diversity may account for why much of the service related to diversity in colleges and university has been relegated to faculty of color (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008). William's perspective substantiated my presupposition that white faculty may avoid diversity dialog; however, William's approach to diversity dialog was quite abrasive as noted in his lexicon and description of his behavior in a specific job interview. His attitude and lack of decorum toward diversity was more likely the culprit for his failed job searches. My interpretation of the various data elements provided by this subject did not align with his explanation that search committees are discriminating against whites in search of diverse hires. Moreover, I rejected the insinuation that diversity can be defined as discrimination.

Other aspects of diversity mentioned included the geographic region of origin, socioeconomic status, perspective, ability, gender, nationality, and age, often referenced as non-traditional students. Furthermore, only Miriam and Scarlett referenced sexual orientation, and Scarlett was the only participant to reference gender identity (fluidity) in

defining diversity. Of equal importance to understanding how the participant in this study categorically defined diversity was the general lack of confidence each participant had in the answers.

### ***Historical and Hypothetical Privilege***

Many of the participants' definitions expressed understanding or appreciating differences among the aforementioned aspects of diversity; however, only Melinda spoke of inequity as she described her definition of diversity. Melinda's dialog centered on economic inequity, not racial inequity. The mention of power, equity or other related references to social justice in the participants' definitions of diversity was of significance given my position on the necessity of a definition that is inclusive of these political and social dynamics.

Examining the participants' perceptions of white privilege provided a baseline for understanding how white identity plays into perceptions and definitions of diversity. "Racial identity conceptualization provides a dimension of within-group variability that potentially increases the precision of findings for researchers. It also provides a framework with which to better understand cross-cultural dyadic interactions" (Rowe et al., 1994, p. 130). Furthermore, Goren and Plaut (2012) suggested that racial identity form and power-cognizance of whites explains diversity attitudes and positive inter-group attitudes.

Judi, Melinda, and Suzi acknowledged white privilege from a historical context. More specifically, Melinda spoke of the Homestead Act and its impact on past inequity. The participants' examples suggested the chronosystem, discussed in Bronfenbrenner's later model, does play a more significant role when the socio-historic events occur in the individual's lifetime. This study's finding suggested the chronosystem's influence is

lessened if the historical events have not occurred in an individual's lifetime. Reflecting on historical events likely do not have the socio-emotional impact that may influence an individual's ideology or perceptions of diversity. More pointedly, historical references were not easily applied to participants' current day setting/systems. Participants either could not or chose not to consider the lingering effects of essential policies and practices established specifically to support whites.

Judi and Melinda generally avoided a more in-depth examination of white privilege and referred instead to poverty, and they spoke in terms of all populations having disadvantages. This behavior is consistent with the avoidant typology in WRCM. This typology is marked by avoidance, ignoring, or minimizing of concerns for ethnic or racial minority issues (Rowe et al., 1994). Suzi's acknowledgment of white privilege was explicit; however, she immediately noted she did not benefit from privilege as she sought access to financial resources for college. Additionally, in her description of historical white privilege, she minimized the role of white supremacy in her description of the colonization and enslavement of minorities. Similar to Judi and Melinda, Suzi illustrated moments of minimizing which are consistent with the unachieved status in white racial consciousness model (Rowe et al., 1994). Finally, William's outright rejection of white privilege shaped how he viewed diversity to the extent that he perceived white privilege and diversity are products of propaganda. The varied level of acceptance of privilege and power related to race suggests these participants were not yet willing to consider diversity in a social justice context. The findings suggested the concepts of diversity and social justice were mutually exclusive for these participants.

Noteworthy was Scarlett's sensitivity to first-generation students as a diverse population with special needs. Scarlett's consideration of first-generation students in her conceptualization of diversity revealed her ability to more readily move beyond categorical definitions to consider secondary dimensions of diversity (Baker et al. 2016). She connected the experience of first-generation students to the working class and poor, middle-class students. She noted that these student populations often need assistance with learning how to access power. Her acknowledgment of the power structure that existed enabled her to be a cultural informant to students who lacked access to power and privilege because of their lack of familiarity with higher education. Scarlett had an understanding of diversity that aligned more closely with the acknowledgment of the social justice position of the researcher.

Additionally, Scarlett's pragmatic approach to supporting students with diverse backgrounds and her understanding of her whiteness suggested an integrative typology in the achieved status of WRCM. Scarlett valued a pluralistic society and had a more complex understanding of historical and sociopolitical issues and how they affect minorities (Rowe et al., 1994). Scarlett is power-cognizant and aware of how white privilege impacts diverse groups. These findings are consistent with Goren and Plaut (2012), who suggested that acknowledgment of white privilege is linked to diversity endorsement.

Finally, the participants shared their thoughts related to the achievement gap. The participants readily acknowledged inequitable outcomes along racial and socioeconomic lines. Overwhelmingly, participants noted poverty as a leading factor in the perpetuation of the achievement gap. Participants were less likely to address the achievement gap in terms of inequitable outcomes along racial lines, although Miriam and Suzi noted they had a very skewed perspective because most of their students of color were athletes or international

students. More importantly, Judi, Melinda, Suzi, and William discussed the achievement gap and noted lack of student accountability/motivation and lack of familial support as a secondary contributing factor to the achievement gap. This is important when considering diversity from a social justice context. Only Scarlett considered the disparate outcomes experienced by poor people of color.

Furthermore, Scarlett was the only study participant who acknowledged that poverty is perpetuated by current and past policies that maintain inequitable outcomes. None of the study participants considered their pedagogical approaches or assessment techniques when discussing the achievement gap. All participants in the study expressed concern or frustration with the existence of the achievement gap.

### ***Summary***

The lack of a standard definition of diversity presents a challenge in creating a baseline understanding of how to operationalize diversity. This lack of a shared definition may be a cause for why PCC's diversity committee waned. Furthermore, without a common understanding or definition of diversity, it is challenging to point to institutional characteristics that demonstrate a commitment to diversity. Participants in this study lacked confidence in their own understanding of diversity, which created a sense of dedication to a seemingly good "cause", yet lacked personal accountability to equitable outcomes. While faculty were able to point to a categorical descriptor of diversity (race, ethnicity, SES, religion, urban, etc.), they often lacked a stated consciousness of their white identity and how this identity impacted their lack of confidence in defining diversity.

Moreover, a diversity definition that does not include acknowledgment of equity, power and privilege does not require attending to the disparate outcomes various populations

experience and limits an institution's ability to address social justice in education. These findings suggested that white faculty in rural institutions lacked an advanced understanding of the complexity of diversity and may not be ready to accept a definition that is inclusive of the acknowledgment of power and privilege.

**Research Question 3: How does the institution's commitment to diversity shape faculty perceptions of diversity?**

The consensus based on faculty input was that PCC supports diversity and is aware of the increase in diverse student populations. Study participants struggled to identify initiatives or programs specifically for faculty that addressed issues related to diversity.

***Operationalizing Diversity***

Murray (2001) posited two-year college faculty development programs tend to lack intentionality and are comprised of random activities. These findings apply to PCC; however, PCC does have an annual professional development day faculty are required to attend. The faculty at PCC have taken some measure of ownership in their professional growth and development. Murray noted that faculty ownership is an essential element in effective faculty development programs. These findings are also consistent with Eddy's (2007) findings that rural community college faculty-led professional development occurs frequently. Furthermore, because faculty in community colleges have larger teaching loads, there is typically less programming available.

Unfortunately, there did not appear to be a formalized structure in place that would support referring to PCC's faculty development as programmatic or intentional. PCC foster a culture that supports PD; however, it lacks the following: connection to a reward system, support from colleagues for investment in teaching, and the belief that the institution's administration values quality teaching. These are all elements needed to have effective PD



(Murray, 2001). PCC's support of faculty development was apparent in the form of financial support that includes covering the cost of attending conference and professional organization members, tuition waivers for courses and full or partial tuition reimbursement for courses taken at other institutions. However, beyond their annual required fall PD, faculty at PCC do not have consistent and continuous PD opportunities that are accessible. Consequently, there were no identified diversity training programs or practices.

The lack of structured professional development exposed a strategy the participants in the study were using to grow their knowledge base. All of the faculty, except Suzi, indicated a significant reliance on blogs, newsletters from professional organizations, social media, and other online resources to advance their content and practical knowledge. Judi, Melinda, Miriam, and Scarlett also relied on print and online media to advance their knowledge base regarding diversity. William noted he had sought professional guidance in the form of written correspondence with a professional organization to get a clear definition of diversity. In the context of Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development Model, the lack of access to on-site professional development opportunities makes mass media outlets a more proximal environmental influence to instructors at PCC.

Moreover, faculty were seeking out their own materials. The lack of guided support from the institution may lead to overreliance of sources that are authored by representatives from the dominant culture, as was the case with the required course textbooks. Moreover, faculty seeking various media professional development materials has resulted in the institution leaving the faculty void of support, which may explain the participants' lack of confidence in their definition of diversity.

Additionally, there appeared to be lack of confidence in the hiring practices of PCC to the extent that the practices result in a diversified faculty. Judi, Miriam, and Scarlett all referenced how diversity was addressed through the hiring process while noting that diverse candidates often do not advance through the hiring process. More specifically, preconceived notions of how diverse candidates' fit within the organization hinder the hiring of diverse candidates. This "fit" is associated with an outsider's ability to acclimate to PCC's rural community. Aligned with Pennington et al. (2006) this study supported the findings that rural communities struggle with the recruitment of faculty. Findings by Glover et al. (2009) suggested that lower salaries may be a barrier to the recruitment of faculty in rural communities. These findings were not substantiated in this study. This study's findings aligned more closely with San Antonio's (2016) position that rural communities are disinvested in their rural communities due to social class factor and stigma associated with living in a rural community. Young people are choosing to out-migrate to more densely populated areas for more significant opportunities and adventure (San Antonio, 2016). PCC's hiring committees may consciously or unconsciously espouse this belief and are excluding candidates whom they feel are outsiders, who may not stay if hired.

Furthermore, the lack of common understanding or definition of diversity may be impacting how faculty express their lack of confidence in institutional hiring practices. This was evident in Melinda's explanation of the committee that was formed to address diversity to meet accreditation standards. Despite being on the committee tasked with leading the charge of diversity, Melinda never mentioned hiring practices in her interviews. Scarlett noted that speaking up about lack of confidence in diverse hiring practices resulted in faculty not being asked to participate in future searches.

When considering PCC as an ecological system and faculty as role players within this system, the influence of the institution on faculty identity and perceptions was vital in shaping not only the college community's understanding of diversity but also the community's perceptions. The influence the faculty wield in the classroom is driven in part by institutional priorities. As noted by faculty, PCC is the epicenter of diversity in their community, which aligns with (Pennington et al., 2006). As such, PCC has led in the space of bringing diverse perspectives to its community. This leadership in the larger ecosystem may have influenced the faculty's perception that PCC supports and embraces diversity and may have influenced faculty who are diversity advocates. Despite bringing in cultural amenities and diverse student engagement programming, PCC has limited faculty specific professional development, including diversity specific training or best practice sharing among faculty. As noted by Park and Denson (2009), cross-departmental strategy and best practice sharing in diversity is essential to advancing faculty diversity advocacy. The faculty who did demonstrate culturally relevant pedagogy were informed and by the exosystem, or media resources outside of PCC, which speaks to the institutions level of commitment to diversity. The resources related to diversity provided for students and professional development opportunities were remote when considering the Ecology of Human Development Model.

### ***Summary***

The faculty at PCC generally perceived that diversity was supported from the administration at PCC. Additionally, they felt diversity is an area where PCC demonstrated leadership in the communities. This leadership was demonstrated in the cultural and artistic

amenities that were brought to campus and made available to students and the community. Faculty may also take advantage of these amenities at their discretion.

Where faculty lacked confidence was in the institution's demonstrated commitment to diversity in the form of professional development and hiring practices. In general, professional development, including professional development specific to diversity, was supported but not accessible on campus. Faculty struggled to recall diversity specific PD offered by PCC and, when they did, they referenced presentations that were offered several years ago. Nevertheless, faculty did feel that students have access to a vast array of activities and programs that allow them to explore cross-cultural dynamics and a few faculty attended some of the programming brought in for students.

Regarding hiring practices, the faculty appeared to believe the institution has a desire to diversify the candidate pool as evident in national searches and hiring committee practices that entailed conversation related to the importance of diversity. Irrespective of national searches and stated commitment to diversity, faculty perceived these efforts did not lead to diverse hires and that candidates were excluded during the hiring process because of fear of fit within the rural community. The consensus was that PCC was not conscious of its bias toward local applicants or PCC's geographical neighboring regions. Furthermore, the collective behavior of conformity or fear of being further isolated may be silencing faculty who generally lack faith in the current system.

**Research Question 4: How does being a rural community effect white faculty's perception of diversity?**

The homogeneity, isolation, and low population density of rural life play a significant role in how diversity is understood. This becomes increasingly evident as one considers the rural-born participants compared to their non-native counterparts. Rural natives describe a

culture that is rooted in and values hard work, family, and traditionalism. Bronfenbrenner's ecology perspective “emphasized the interwoven links of family, culture, and historical context” (San Antonio, 2016, p. 248). This perspective was present in this study as Judi and Melinda described German heritage, family labor on the farm and the importance of tradition. Suzi also shared sentiment linked to family tradition. These linked values and traditions have been solidified across multiple settings (i.e., school, church, work, ideology) as they have transitioned, developed, and encountered people with similar upbringings. The natives to the rural community acknowledged these shared values and noted that they often attributed these values to those around them because they assumed they are similar to one another.

As previously noted, the rural-born participants in this study relied on students and previous experiences from professional development and their college experiences in shaping these views of diversity. Study participants described PCC’s residents as conformist who lacked a willingness to challenge authority and often felt that people around them share the same worldviews. For participants native to PCC, the influences across their systems during their lifespan have primarily been shaped by other white people – in schools, in church, and at home. Because the PCC communities were overwhelmingly white and faculty’s common initial recognized characteristic of diversity was race, student-athletes, who were predominately people of color, had a significant influence in shaping the faculty’s perception of diversity. Another factor related to the rural experience is associated with how rural participants make in-group value judgments. Both of these assertions are discussed next in greater detail.

*Student-Athletes the Epicenter of Diversity*

Scarlett best described the issues with having a campus where student-athletes become the group that is representative of diversity. She noted that because the student-athlete population was mainly African American, stereotypes attributed to primarily black males were cemented by the actions of a select group. The issue that was not directly addressed by the participants, but was hinted at, was the lack of college readiness, academic outcomes and college attendance on an athletic scholarship. Although not explicitly stated, the study participants implied sentiments that some faculty feel student-athletes are disruptive to the learning environment because of lack of effort and a general lack of decorum in the classroom. The study participants, themselves, did not convey this as their primary concern; however, their sentiments would suggest that many faculty in this rural community feel that diversity of this type is an asset on the court or field, but not necessarily in the classroom.

Finally, the student-athlete population was mostly minority, and all study participants recognized the achievement gap as disparate academic outcomes along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. Additionally, all study participants acknowledged the achievement gap as it existed within their class and institution. Notably, the experience or differential outcomes of student-athletes was largely ignored because faculty did not consider power, privilege, or equity in their conceptualization of diversity. Furthermore, this was no evidence that faculty were actively engaged in strategies to address the gaps in outcomes. This may be, in part, because the values of rural natives were centered on hard work and family.

Additionally, William valued meritocracy. As noted, the consensus of these participants was that a significant contributing factor to the achievement gap was lack of

motivation, accountability, and family support. When considering the values of these faculty, it was clear that they perceived there was a lack of alignment between their values and those of their student-athletes. My supposition was that this perceived lack of alignment may not affect a rural faculty member's stated definition of diversity, but it certainly will impact how they experience diversity. Subsequently, athletes become outsiders whose values do not align with rural ways of living, and because they lack motivation, lack accountability or lack familial support, they may not achieve at the same rate as their white counterparts. White rural faculty who attribute academic success to the previously stated values may not acknowledge their role in mitigating the achievement gap.

### ***Outsiders***

Another important factor related to the influence of rurality on diversity perceptions is related to in-group identification. Pennington et al. (2006) noted that one of the challenges associated with recruiting and retaining faculty in rural community colleges is associated with candidates not sharing cultural and political values that align with the community. The importance of alignment within the macrosystem, the locale of cultural norms and ideology (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), seems to have significant weight in the rural community. It would appear that PCC as a system avoided the challenge of recruiting faculty who may not fit their cultural norms and ideology. The conscious or unconscious bias toward local hires likely created a perpetual cycle of homogeneity that existed within the PCC faculty ranks. PCC as an institution, appreciated diversity yet sought to perpetuate itself as a predominately white institution with conservative roots.

### ***Summary***

According to the participants, rural values were linked to family, hard work, tradition and conservatism. Merit and hard work were values associated with one another in this study. The findings suggested that the influence of the rural community leads to an appreciation of values that are similar to their own ideological views. High value and in-group identification were made with those who came from the rural communities of PCC on the assumption that they shared the same values and beliefs. This in-group identification based on an assumed shared value system was problematic to the extent it excluded outsiders during the hiring process. Furthermore, low achieving student-athletes, who were outsiders, were viewed as lacking the rural values that lead to successful outcomes. This value-based judgment excused the faculty from making diverse hires or considering the pedagogical and assessment techniques needed to assist in improving equitable outcomes for all students, particularly students of color.

### **Research Question 5: How do white faculty in rural institutions perceive diversity in their classroom, in their curriculum and in their pedagogy?**

The consensus was the diversity in the classroom is an asset. The female participants in the study spoke of the diversity of students as an asset, while William spoke of his experiential diversity as an asset to the classroom.

### ***Students as Teachers***

When considering diversity in the classroom and pedagogy, the women in the study leaned toward an appreciation of diversity of perspective, ability, learning styles, relevance, and access to resources. Diversity, when considered in the classroom context, was a much broader construct and participants referenced age, culture and other aspects of diversity including modality of the course. The diversity advocates in the study each demonstrated



dialogic pedagogy, collaborative learning, student-centered pedagogy, and contextually relevant content. Those displaying diversity advocacy tendencies drew from student experiences and student input during the class meeting to ensure a participatory learning environment. This practice is consistent with Flynn et al. (2017) who posited the culturally relevant educators encourage students to see themselves as part of the community in the classroom. They also noted that students finding their voice in the classroom and society are an essential responsibility that culturally relevant educators strive to achieve. All students were positioned to contribute to the class during my observation periods; however, I have learned the rural experience may entail masking or silencing of unconventional views.

Although the curriculum in many instances was defined at the institutional level based on regent transfer articulation requirements, where applicable, faculty did acknowledge their freedom in deliberating on required course textbooks. Faculty also stated a high degree of autonomy in how they meet the objectives outlined in the approved curriculum. Thus, a shared value among the diversity advocate oriented faculty was a willingness to learn from students and a willingness to make adjustments based on student needs to improve their instruction. Martins-Shannon, and White (2012) noted that while many faculty may not consider the cultural, ethnic and racial norms they have been exposed to throughout their education, culturally relevant educators are not only aware but work to incorporate diverse perspectives into their curriculum as to provide a better representation of various historical viewpoints. The female participants in this study stated a commitment to this practice.

Conversely, William's resentment toward the agenda of diversity was evident in his attitude toward the increased diversity of the community college student population. Additionally, his narrow focus on race in his definition of diversity and his teacher-centered

praxis may explain why he felt no obligation to consider whether or not changing demographics had an impact on the classroom. His beliefs that diversity runs counter to equality has resulted in the rejection of culturally relevant pedagogy. Moreover, his frustration with the “agenda” of diversity being pushed on people, had caused him to more deeply believe that no changes in instructional techniques should to be considered. Considering William's approaches to teaching, his disposition toward diversity and his conceptualization of diversity as a race-oriented construct would suggest that William was aware of his racial identity and was opposed to any acts or perceived advantages that would even the playing field for marginalized groups. This disposition is consistent with Rowe et al.'s explanation of a conflictive typology in the achieved identity status (1994).

Finally, a point of contradiction in this study was the lack of textbook author diversity. Because he felt that diversity impedes first amendment rights, William had a plethora of resources available to students in the form of a diverse supplemental resource list. Although these resources were not required texts, he did make this information accessible to his students so that they could have access to a variety of viewpoints within his discipline. Ironically, the participants in the study who stated they used books that provided diverse gender perspective or culturally diverse perspectives, assigned text for the courses I observed that were authored by members of the dominant cultural and predominantly white male perspective. Based on these observations, it appeared that diversity was not intentionally embedded into the curriculum on a consistent bias. However, Suzi and Scarlett did show films that displayed diverse political and cultural perspectives in their classes.

Lewis et al. (2013) suggested that the invisibility of minorities or marginalized populations, specifically African American women, is a form of intellectual and academic

microaggression. I agree and have extended this notion that exclusion of diverse perspectives also does a disservice to rural community college students by perpetuating their homogenous views. Inconsistent attempts to be inclusive in the curriculum are apparent and, with institutional support or best practice sharing among faculty, a more comprehensive approach could serve all students well, particularly students with diverse backgrounds.

### ***Summary***

The faculty in this study valued diversity to the extent that it enhances the learning environment. Upon analysis, the data suggested that faculty who were concerned with the limited exposure rural students have before college, utilized diversity in the classroom to improve rural student perspective-taking. This effort aligns with Gurin, Nagda, and Lopez (2004) whose findings revealed that positive interaction across diverse groups resulted in more democratic sentiments, including an ability to see other individuals' point of view. All of the women participants utilized teaching techniques and strategies that allowed for the diversity of student experience, perspective, and culture to be an intricate part of the classroom experience. These strategies were considered to be tools for classroom engagement and were not necessarily intentional culturally relevant practices, although each of the women participants did acknowledge an awareness of the various cultural and diverse experiences their students bring to the college and classroom. The practices they used exemplified a student-centered pedagogical approach. Notably, there was a lack of diverse representation in the curriculum although the women participants stated they made efforts to be intentional about this practice. The inclusive practices witnessed in the classroom did not readily extend to the curriculum and content the students engaged in throughout the course.

## Conclusion

The study participants' responses regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> research question established that background influences associated with sentiment of feeling like an outsider shapes how rural white faculty perceive diversity. Feeling othered lies in being a non-native resident and having non-dominant political views. Additionally, the values of spirituality and civic engagement are influential factors in advocacy for diversity. Furthermore, the experience of the study participants suggests that undergraduate collegiate experiences play a pivotal role in how white faculty formed their diversity views and developed their teaching philosophy. The rural born participants grew to appreciate diversity through their early educational and professional interactions with individuals whose backgrounds varied from their own. Miriam, Scarlett, and William considered diversity a normal state of life because of their upbringing across the country, on the East coast, and West coast, respectively.

Challenges were identified with defining diversity in each participant's response. The study participants primarily relied on legal, categorical attributes associated with diverse populations. Excluding William, the study participants identified secondary attributes associated with the multiplicity of identities individuals possess. Moreover, Judi, Melinda, Miriam, Suzi, and Scarlett broadened their definition of diversity when they considered the classroom setting. Some dimensions of diversity participants considered in the classroom setting related to SES and access to resources, ability, learning styles, and first-generation student status. However, the lack of a shared definition of diversity within the institution might be prohibiting the institution from operationalizing diversity in a meaningful way. Lastly, all participants, except Scarlett, illustrated a varied level of acknowledgment of power and privilege structures that exists in higher education. This suggests that without a clear

definition of diversity, it can be challenging for white faculty to broach and address the subject of equity in higher education.

The findings associated with the 3<sup>rd</sup> research question suggest the prevailing view is that PCC is committed to diversity. PCC provides a wide variety of cultural and artistic experiences and opportunities that are diverse and widely available to students and the community. The guest speakers and programs are not designed for faculty; however, faculty take advantage of these amenities. The study participants revealed a lack of available professional development as the institution's commitment to diversity was discussed. Furthermore, the faculty felt supported in their pursuit of professional development; however, this support was contingent on the availability of funds, though funding did not appear to be an issue. Finally, the institution's commitment to diversity was called into question when the diversity of faculty was considered. The lack of diversity was linked to hiring practices by most study participants. My analysis suggests that PCC has a stated commitment to diversity, yet it struggles to demonstrate a commitment to diversity from a faculty perspective conclusively.

The responses related to the 4<sup>th</sup> research question on the impact of being in a rural community and its effect on white faculty perceptions of diversity were linked to being native to PCC's service area, the values of the rural community, and the propensity to extend these values to judgement toward students' ability and prospective faculty fit. Native study participants described themselves as hard-working, family-oriented traditionalist. Rural residents who were not native to PCC described rural residents as overtly nice people who struggled with nonconformity, narrow-minded, unwilling to question authority and deep

commitment to their conservative values. Though not explicitly stated, the analysis suggests the impact of being in a rural community is associated with the lack of inclusion of outsiders.

Furthermore, because of the lack of diversity that exists in the rural community, students who come to PCC with diverse backgrounds tend to be expected to bring that diversity of experience, culture, and perspective to the classroom to inform other students and the faculty. This asset-based approach was apparent to the female participants in the study who demonstrated diversity advocacy; however, the association between students of color, particularly athletes and their lack of equitable outcomes was attributed to lack of motivation, lack of accountability, and lack of familial support needed to be successful. The parallel between perceived PCC area values and explanation of the achievement gap suggest faculty think students are outsiders whose values do not align with their own. The sentiment is that diverse students bring experiences to the classroom that inform students who come from small, rural high schools. These experiences can create great learning opportunities in the classroom; however, this relationship appeared to be one-directional in that faculty did not express intentional strategies that utilized the experiences and values of rural students to inform students who were not from the area. Lastly, because the values of PCC's service area were deeply ingrained in white faculty's identity because of the homogeneity of the area and outsider's inability to outwardly express dissonance, there appeared to be a preservation of likeness through the hiring process. This implicit bias has resulted in a faculty described by one participant as disproportionately local and recognized by all participants as overwhelmingly white.

The 5<sup>th</sup> and final research question explored the perceptions of diversity in the classroom, in their curriculum, and their instruction. The analysis of the white faculty

experience with diversity suggested that those who demonstrated diversity advocacy traits considered the backgrounds of students, particularly diverse students, as assets that were important to the classroom experience. The importance of making relevant connects in the classroom was verbalized by these participants and observed through data collection. Moreover, they utilized instructional practices that were inclusive in nature and student-centered. The participants who demonstrated diversity advocacy had an expanded definition of diversity when they considered the classroom. These faculty considered student learning styles, first-generation status, and socio-economic status.

The student-centered approach to instruction resulted in culturally relevant educational practices that included dialog and collaborative learning. The faculty expressed intentionality in their approach to the extent that they not only wanted to have an engaging classroom, but also recognized students, specifically those from small rural communities, have not had exposure to a diverse student population. The faculty used dialog and collaboration to inform them as instructors and to educate the other students in the class. Unfortunately, the same level of intentionality and cultural relevance was not present in the curriculum. The text for the courses observed in this study lacked gender, racial, and ethnic diversity. However, William, the diversity antagonist, did provide a comprehensive supplemental reading list that offered diverse perspectives within his content area. The lack of integration of diverse perspectives across the curriculum would suggest that diversity was not embedded into PCC's students' course content.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

This study was designed with the intent of expanding empirical research on white faculty perceptions of diversity in rural community colleges. The findings of the study led to the following implications for practice and policy.

#### **Practice**

The study participants each demonstrated a lack of confidence in defining diversity. The lack of a standard definition or general agreed upon understanding of diversity calls into question how one can be fully committed to something so ill-defined. While the nature of diversity can be personal in nature, the ambiguity of the definition can be crippling to the position of diversity advocacy.

Furthermore, the common thread among participants was their baseline definitions of diversity was linked to race. The overrepresentation of minorities among the student-athlete population crystalizes stereotypes and may have a negative impact on a more inclusive definition of diversity. Moreover, as students enter a pluralistic society, faculty should be prepared to define and explain diversity in a broader context. PCC administration, faculty, and staff should work to develop a diversity definition and diversity statement that can be shared broadly within the institution so that students, staff, and faculty have a shared understanding of what diversity means. This step will aid in facilitating diversity dialog across the institution and may assist the accreditation action committee in achieving the goal of “increasing understanding of other cultures.” A shared definition of diversity paired with a specific charge for the committee will assist PCC in operationalizing its commitment to diversity.



Second, there appears to be a need for in-house professional development resources. The institution is void of a professional development center or designated position that attends to the professional development needs of faculty. Without this type of resource, faculty are supported in a financial sense with regard to professional development, but they are not guided by the priorities or encouragement of the institution. It is unclear whether professional development beyond the required annual meeting is mandated by PCC and the varied levels of professional development engagement yield inconsistent pedagogical practices.

Except for William, the study participants had formal education in teaching at various points in their career, which is atypical for community college faculty, particularly career and technical education faculty. Professional development related to teaching style, learning styles, and culturally relevant practices would support faculty in identifying and intentionally implementing strategies to address their stated frustration with the disproportionate academic success of poor and minority students. Currently, the faculty attribute the achievement gap in part to values judgments and do not recognize their role in having an impact on disparate outcomes. While faculty have a student-centered praxis (excluding William) in their teaching, there does not appear to be a formal or informal opportunity for best practice sharing among faculty to support their professional development, particularly as it relates to diversity. PCC could benefit from developing a professional development plan that includes a dedicated staff role for professional development, faculty release time faculty who are willing to facilitate professional development in-house or the development of a media resource bank to support encouragement of inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Third, faculty at PCC question the role of diversity in hiring practices, particularly in the hiring of faculty. There appears to be confusion in how a commitment to diversity plays out in the hiring practice, and one study participants feel that consideration of diversity in hiring practices may constitute discrimination. The lack of a clear definition may have a role in perpetuating this lack of understanding; however, more important is the lack of confidence that PCC is committed to considering diverse faculty candidates. The sentiments of the participants in this study suggest that PCC faculty and hiring committee are well intended and unaware of their biases or narrow views toward hiring diverse candidates. As the number of qualified, diverse candidates increases across the country, PCC's administration should evaluate their hiring process and practices to ensure candidates are not intentionally, unfairly disqualified based on their geographical region of origin or the perception that outsiders will not fit or stay at the institution. Furthermore, PCC may want to consider unconscious bias training for all staff and faculty, particularly those who serve on hiring committees.

Finally, being white in a rural setting that is homogenous has a significant influence on the faculty's diversity lens. This influence is mainly present for rural born natives. The values and ideology they ascribe to or have been shaped by in their early childhood reverberate throughout their lives as they are continually exposed to people like themselves. Even Suzi, the rural-born resident who found shame in the narrow-minded, conservative views of their family and community members, found herself carrying on customs she viewed as cumbersome because it was an expectation. Simply put, traditionalism is a core value in rural settings.

For the non-native rural white faculty, the expectation of conformity weighed heavy in how they exist within their community and at the college. Although the college is consistently viewed as a more inclusive environment than the PCC service areas, the propensity to mask one's views as to maintain the false harmony is apparent. What is not clear is the impact this has on diverse student populations. The role of faculty member carries with it a degree of authority when you consider the role in relation to students. Faculty who do not feel empowered to express nonconformist views, likely are not teaching students how to freely express themselves, academically or otherwise. With the voices of the nonconformist silenced, PCC should consider identifying ways to facilitate civil discourse through training for staff, faculty, and students. Noting PCC is recognized as a leader in its communities when it comes to diversity and inclusion, opening up facilitated civil discourse dialog will allow individuals with diverse perspectives a place to be heard.

### **Policy**

As noted by study participants, local residents, or individuals in the neighboring geographic regions appeared to be hired at a disproportionate rate for faculty positions, despite national searches. As noted by one administrator, there was one full-time person of color on the faculty at PCC. An intensive review of PCCs Equal Employment Opportunities Utilization Reports will assist in identifying hiring trends across all job categories/classifications, including faculty. Using the utilization report and reviewing hiring practices, PCC may be able to identify whether not there are policies or practices in place that limit equal employment opportunities for women or men based on race, ethnicity or national origin.

In terms of institutional policy, it is highly recommended that PCC consider policies regarding structured professional development for faculty. Policies that establish required regular professional development, including diversity training, will assist PCC faculty in having a more structured approach to professional growth and development and will address the issue of inability to define diversity. Furthermore, institutional policies for required professional development created with faculty can provide faculty clear guidelines on what financial assistance is available, how many hours of continuing education is required and can assist in establishing professional development as a priority.

Finally, as the demographics of the United States change and begin to reflect a more diverse student population, state legislator may want to fund diversity rich curriculum to support colleges and universities with diversity graduation requirements for credentials. As students gain access to the world through technological advances, requiring diversity rich curriculum will prepare the United States to be a leader in the global economy.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study sought to examine the perceptions of white faculty on diversity in rural community colleges. Through data analysis, a significant theme of students as teachers was unveiled. In and of itself, this theme does not appear negligent or ill-conceived. It appears to be an asset-based approach that enables students and faculty to share in the learning experience to co-construct reality. However, white faculty are relying on diverse students (students from various geographic regions, athletes, students of color, international students, etc.) to teach them and other students on the assumption that this behavior is not exploitive.

Literature suggests that positive interaction with diverse groups of people in college setting develops critical thinking skills (Bowman, 2010; Hurtado, 2005) and can lead to

increased civic engagement (Gurin et al., 2004; Hurtado, 2005) for students, I am unaware of research that exists on the experience of diverse students in rural community college setting who are the de facto second teacher in the classroom. The previously cited research relates specifically to four-year colleges and universities whose setting may not encompass rural institutions. The isolation of the rural experience, the white racial homogeneity, and conservative cultural values that are experienced when diverse students leave the classroom combined with the pressure of representing an entire population may result in a different student experience than those documented to date. Further research to address the diverse student experience in a rural predominately white community college setting may reveal whether or not utilizing diverse students as teachers is beneficial to the student experience and other student outcomes.

Finally, this study sought to make meaning of white faculty perceptions in the context of WRCM and Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development. Notably, the degree to which one identifies with their whiteness was not a priority in this study; however, the concept of privilege and power were included in the study. These elements brought forth varied degrees of acceptance or rejection of the construct of privilege. With this in mind, future examination of the degree to which one identifies with their whiteness in a rural setting and its impact on defining diversity and diversity advocacy will be helpful in determining how perceptions are shaped.

### **Reflection**

The analysis, conclusion, and implication provided above are the result of immersion in diversity and rural community research. Moreover, the methodology and methods of this study called for multiple visits to PCC's service areas that included overnight stays in the

community, utilization of services in the community, and many observation hours both on and off campus. As result of this, my experiences as a researcher interacting with faculty, the community and mining the data, was both affirmed my commitment to diversity work and solidified my position that all educators, including members of the dominant culture, must play a part diversity and inclusion if we are ever to achieve equitable outcomes. The next chapter, which is an auto-ethnography, will provide a more detailed reflection of my experiences as a researcher at PCC and the impact this study has had on my positionality.

## **CHAPTER 6. MY PAST WON'T ALLOW ME TO IGNORE WHAT I HAVE SEEN AND WHAT I HAVE HEARD**

This intent of this study was to gain insight into how white faculty perceived diversity in rural community college setting. As previously stated, my interest in this topic lies in part on my educational experiences that were mostly void of diverse perspectives. I attribute this to the over-representation of white faculty in our education system. What follows are my experiences in the context of being present in PCC's communities, researching diversity, and existing in a society that places women of color in a subordinate status. The convergence of these elements elicited a wide range of emotions and shaped how I experienced my life through the research process. The following Chapter is divided into two sections: What I've Seen and What I've Heard.

### **What I Have Seen**

#### **Rurality**

In her TEDx, Helen Turnbull noted, "There's no such thing as an innocent eye." As I traversed the highway making my way through the rural communities served by PCC, I immediately saw a shift in scenery that invoked a flood of thoughts and judgment that I am embarrassed to readily admit were there. Having limited exposure to rural communities and an affinity for large metropolitan areas, I realized through intensive self-reflection, I had ill-conceived, preconceived notions about individuals who choose rural living. Driving the wide-open spaces, viewing the dilapidated trailer homes, the storm-weathered barns that were merely remnants of structures that once provided shelter for livestock and the scene of vacant businesses that were not able to sustain because of a shrinking local economy, I wondered...why? Why would anyone choose this way of living?

The rural scenery of PCC lived up to every stereotype I didn't know I had imagined. Nothing was surprising about the landscape. However, the image of poverty that I had believed was more apparent than I was comfortable taking in. The sprawl of cows, barns, cornfields, and the seamless transition from one small town to the next caused me to consider why one might choose to forego community college. In rural communities, access to campus is a significant issue. For individuals with limited means, the commitment needed to make this trek to school and expending the resources necessary to make the drive shows a high level of dedication on the part of the student. Students in PCC's areas could travel upwards of one hour to get to the nearest campus. While online courses are abundant, the connectivity one experiences with the internet is questionable based on how rural the residence is, assuming the student can afford the service.

As I drove the roads, I searched for cell phone reception and stared into passing vehicles looking for someone who looked like me – seeing none. I shared with a colleague that I needed to prepare to be pulled over because, based on previous experience, being black in predominately white, unfamiliar spaces, draws much attention. While traveling 65 miles per hour in a 60 mile per hour zone, I was pulled over by a white police officer. He was more interested in my purpose for being in town than he was in the speed of my vehicle. Although the encounter was uneventful and I was not ticketed, I could not help but wonder if my complexion played a part being pulled over. In a community with approximately 45 blacks according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), surely a new face stands out. Despite admittedly speeding, my past won't allow me to disregard that many times I have been pulled over for merely being black. My experience with the small, close-knit community of PCC won't let me ignore the fact that an unfamiliar black face may raise suspicion.



**Feeling othered**

Shortly after being pulled over, I entered the local Walmart, sure that I would find people of color in customer service positions. I did not. This experience was foreign to me, having been raised in a community where people of color are disproportionately represented in the service industry. I did see one black man exiting the Walmart with an individual who appeared to be his significant other. I picked up my paces to see if our eyes might make contact on the assumption that he, too, wanted to see someone like him.

I parallel this experience to that of my first day on campus when I took a self-guided tour. I was approached by an African woman from Zimbabwe. I noticed her tracking my movements, stalling her walk to allow me to catch her stride. We walked several paces near each other before she sheepishly asked if I was looking for something. Through her beautiful accent, you could hear the uncertainty in her question. I would later make sense of that uncertainty when I encountered a student-athlete from Chad. I explained why I was on campus and let her know I did not need assistance. We engaged in small talk, I thanked her for her time, and we went our separate ways.

A couple of hours later, I was approached by a tall, thin-framed basketball player. He walked past me, giving me a quick glance. He then turned around and approached me and asked: "Are you from Africa?" Surprised by this question, I asked him to approach. He explained that he thought I was African and stated that from his perspective, "You look like one of us." I struggled with what that meant for me and am resolved that my personal meaning making was inconsequential in the context of understanding the PCC experience.

Of more importance was the relationship to the feeling othered theme found in this study. It would appear that within the student population, black African students may be

seeking connection with other Africans. This experience becomes more significant when I considered that faculty in the study did not differentiate these populations in our discussion.

The eagerness to find someone in their likeness was not isolated to African students. I wandered the halls of PCC's campuses looking for gender-neutral restroom signage and reference to activities for diverse student populations. I saw none. I looked for photos of students of color that were not stock photos or depictions of other people of color, and there were very few. In half of the classes I observed, students made reference to having at least one more person of color in the room. These comments were made before the start of the course and were directed at me or directed toward their peers in the class. I and others ignored the overtures to a dialog. I did so to remain the observer in the field work. I did not want to become a participant in the classroom as to not influence diversity dialog.

As the students of PCC and I sought people in our own image, I realized I was making judgments about those who were not in my likeness. While in the community, I stared a little longer at white individuals covered in tattoos, noticing how much they stood out in this community. I also saw how their otherness made me feel a bit uneasy as we are approached our vehicles in the parking lot. I noticed how all of the televisions in the hotel were set to Fox News in the morning, and I made judgments. My unconscious bias was showing. I spent the night pondering what prejudice or stereotypes might be attributed to me by the rural residents in PCC's area. My eyes were not innocent, and neither were theirs.

My customer service interactions compared to my white counterparts were different. I was asked questions such as: "Where are you from?" versus "What brings you in today? Are you visiting or just passing through?" Recognizing what I initially thought of as hypersensitivity to diversity issues during my research period, I searched for indicators that

would suggest I was not from the PCC area and why my white counterparts were not asked the “Where are you from” question. Noting no apparent difference other than our skin tone, I realized how microaggression can impact diverse individuals in the rural community.

### **Summary**

After further reflection, I no longer considered my acute awareness of diversity matters as hypersensitivity. Instead, I now recognized these feelings are my responsibility as a researcher to be present or “be there” in the research process. Because of my personal connection to the research and the time spent in the communities served by PCC, my “there” became everywhere. I could not compartmentalize the experiences, the interviews, and I could not overlook the fact that when I left PCC, I returned to another mostly white space in Iowa.

I am carrying this research with me at all times. The impact of what I have seen and the feelings that I felt during the research process have caused me to more closely interrogate my bias. As a result, I plan to explore conducting more research related to implicit bias. Furthermore, the experience of wanting to make connections with people in my likeness and having these feeling reciprocated by students on campus, suggest that students in rural communities with diverse backgrounds are seeking opportunities to connect with people like them.

### **What I Have Heard**

#### **Well-intended white people**

I listened to the participants in the study express an understanding of white privilege and then distance themselves from its benefits. I heard the participants acknowledge the achievement gap, express frustration with the persistence of the achievement gap and

unequivocally lack a strategy for addressing the gap. I listened to the things that were later redacted or edited to appear less derogatory. The sentiments of well-intended white people have an indelible mark on how practices are shaped, the outcomes in our education system and the perpetuation of racism, sexism, and bigotry. As long as the dominant culture is permitted to hide behind the term ‘well-intended,’ the pace of transformative education that includes equitable outcomes will creep at a snail’s pace. My reactions to what I heard and the implication of discontinuity in what white faculty are willing to say privately versus publicly are reflected hereafter.

**Power: I haven’t benefited from privilege either**

There is a misconception of white privilege. From this study and in my experience, white people resent the fact that they may have had advantages that people of color did not. Frankly, I have the same resentment, but as a survival mechanism, I have to suppress this resentment to function in white dominant culture. Much like whites ignore their privilege, as a coping mechanism, I often overlook it as well. My choice to ignore white privilege is mostly strategic. I do not want to regularly remind myself that I have somehow been disenfranchised at any point throughout my life. I choose to not dwell on these details. I also prefer to ignore privilege at times to maintain false harmony to move toward a goal that is larger than my personal observations or sentiments. Lastly, I ignore privilege and power at times because of fatigue. It is exhausting work, and sometimes I wait for others to step forward and say what needs to be said. I need white allies.

Whites who acknowledge privilege, dismiss the lingering implications of historical privilege, attribute academic outcomes to values, and state no benefit from white privilege, may be complicit. I, too, am an accomplice to the power structure when I choose to ignore

systems that are stacked against minority groups, regardless of my reasoning. However, my coping mechanism is not masked by the term “well-intended.” Well-intended has become a term that is substituted for ill-informed, and as educators, I do not feel we are afforded the luxury of not knowing or understanding diversity. Our increasingly diverse student population will soon demand a baseline understanding. The financial viability of our institutions will require attention to equitable outcomes because if students from diverse communities are not completing their education, revenue will be lost.

In this study, I found that for those who do want to speak up, nonconformist viewpoints create a fear of isolation. Speaking up against racism, sexism, or inequities in personal and professional life is met with resistance. The more candid participants were in sharing their viewpoints, the more they redacted, edited or whispered responses even though we were the only individuals in the room.

The irony in all of this is I cannot “unhear” what I heard. I am left to cope with the sentiments of sexism and racism that are widely present in a community that expresses outward niceties but harbors negative perceptions of people like me. All of this caused me to question how many people in my own community are outwardly nice but inwardly opposed to seeing me as an equal. Furthermore, my interactions with William caused me to question how many white men see me and others like me as a threat to their upward mobility. Am I working alongside white men and women who have these same views? I will likely never know, but the experience at PCC has caused me to observe and question more deeply the intent of white people with whom I have peripheral relationships.

**Summary**

In a rural setting, white privilege is an inflammatory term. In retrospect, I have operationalized diversity as a term that must be inclusive of the aspect of power and privilege. Rural communities are not ready to embrace this term and rightfully so. If the participants lack confidence in their own understanding of diversity, the introduction of power and privilege was challenging for most faculty to navigate. However, as evident in our student outcomes, we cannot ignore issues of power and privilege and their role in preserving social injustice. It is not enough to be concerned or frustrated with inequity and point the finger at student values. Community college educators, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or worldviews, must move past frustration and move toward actionable solutions that assist all students in achieving their academic goals. The focus on teaching and learning is a characteristic that sets community colleges apart from four-year colleges and universities. If we are not attentive to the needs of all students, especially poor students and students of color, we are not living up to our mission of genuinely being accessible.

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## APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202  
Ames, Iowa 50014  
515 294-4566

Date:	04/09/2018		
To:	LaDrina Wilson	Lorenzo Baber	
From:	Office for Responsible Research		
Title:	White Faculty Perception of Diversity: A Rural Community College Perspective		
IRB ID:	18-090		
Submission Type:	Initial Submission	Review Type:	Expedited
Approval Date:	04/09/2018	Date for Continuing Review:	04/08/2020

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the **recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp**.
- **Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study**, when documented consent is required.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study.
- **Inform the IRB if the Principal Investigator and/or Supervising Investigator end their role or involvement with the project** with sufficient time to allow an alternate PI/Supervising Investigator to assume oversight responsibility. Projects must have an eligible PI to remain open.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.**
- **Stop all human subjects research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Human subjects research activity can resume once IRB approval is re-established.
- **Submit an application for Continuing Review** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

LaDrina Wilson  
1029 W. 15<sup>th</sup> Street  
Davenport, IA

LaDrina,

Attached you will find approval for your recently completed, Institutional Review Board application. There were a few minor comments from our reviewers that I provided to you, but nothing that would hinder your research at PCC.

A reminder that this approval is good for one year from today. If your research extends beyond the year, it will need additional approval.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely

IRB Chair

Parcard Community College

April 12, 2018

[pseudonym]

## APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT COMMUNICATION

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

College of Human Sciences  
Department of Educational  
Leadership and Policy Studies  
N243 Lagomarcino Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-3195  
515 294-4143  
[www.elps.hs.iastate.edu/](http://www.elps.hs.iastate.edu/)

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FACULTY

**Title of Study:** White Faculty Perceptions of Diversity: A Rural Community College Perspective

**Investigators:** LaDrina Wilson, MsEd., Graduate Student, Iowa State University

Lorenzo Baber, Ph.D., Associate Professor Division Head for Higher Education,  
Iowa State University

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include people who choose to take part- your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about this study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

#### Introduction

Colleges and universities across the country are seeing a significant increase in diversity in the student populations being served. Despite the increase in advanced degrees earned by people with diverse backgrounds, the professoriate remains largely comprised of white faculty members. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of white faculty teaching in a rural setting and examine how their experiences and changing demographics impact their perceptions of diversity or their approach to teaching.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a faculty member, who has taught at a rural community college for at least one academic year, who self-identifies as white.

#### Description of Procedures

If you agree to be part of this research study you will be asked to complete a brief background questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire you will be asked to participate in two 45-60 minute interviews at a private location on your campus. In these interviews, you will be asked to reflect on your personal and professional experiences. Semi-structured protocol will be used to generate conversation about various aspects of your background, experiences and perspectives regarding diversity. I would like to audio record the interviews to make sure our conversations are accurately captured. The digital recordings will be transcribed to allow the researcher(s) to analyze the data. You will be provided an electronic copy of the transcript for your review to allow you to redact, edit or provide additional comments. The transcript will be submitted to you via email and you are asked to return all changes to the researcher via email within 5 business days of initial receipt. The researcher may contact you via phone to follow up and get clarification on edits if information submitted is not legible or unclear. I would also like to observe one of your classes and review the syllabus for the class that is observed. This observation allows the researcher to understand how diversity is experienced in the classroom. You will be provided the opportunity to submit written reflection statements in the days following our interviews.



## Background Questionnaire Faculty Perceptions of Diversity

**First Name:**

**Last Name:**

**Date of Birth:**

**Institution:**

Researcher's Use Only  
Key:

Background Questionnaire  
Faculty Perceptions of Diversity

\*\*\*\*\*

This questionnaire is intended to gather background information on potential research participants. Based on your comfort level, please answer the questions provided below.

**1) What is your gender?**

**2) In what country were you born?**

**3) Please select one of the options below to identify your race.**

- A. White
- B. Black or African American
- C. American Indian or Alaska Native
- D. Asian
- E. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- F. Other

Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

- G. Two or more races

Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**4) What is your ethnicity?**

**5) Do you speak a language other than English?**

Yes (please specify your languages) \_\_\_\_\_

No

**6) Do you have a disability?**

**7) What is your relationship status?**

**8) Please select the household income range that most appropriately describes your current income:**

- A. Less than \$30,000
- B. \$30,000-\$60,000
- C. \$60,000-\$90,000
- D. \$90,000-\$120,000
- E. \$120,000+

**9) Please select the option below that best describe how long you've been teaching at your current institution.**

- A. >1 year of experience
- B. 1-3 years of experience
- C. 3-7 years of experience
- D. 7-10 years of experience
- E. 10+ years of experience

**10) What is your religious or spiritual affiliation?**

## APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Interview #1 Protocol-White Faculty Perceptions of Diversity

1. Tell me about yourself. For example, what courses do you have experience teaching?
2. Have you taught at other institutions? If so, in what other types of institutions have you taught?
3. According to research, many community college faculty are not trained as educators, rather they have experience as working professionals or are content experts prior teaching. With this in mind, what would you say influences your teaching style or pedagogical approaches? How you describe your teaching techniques?
4. What process do you use or what influences your course content? To what degree does your institution provide support in enhancing course content and/or professional development?
5. How would you define diversity?
6. What aspects of your personal background play a role how you define diversity? What are some of your outside influences that help shape your beliefs?
7. Based on current literature and data, the community college student population is becoming increasingly diverse. What do you see as the role or impact of diversity in rural community colleges? Has the diversification of students caused you to consider changes to your teaching approaches? Why or why not?
8. How would you describe your institution's commitment to diversity?
9. In what way has your institution supported your professional development as it relates to diversity? Are you aware of any diversity initiatives/programs at your institution? If so, what has been your experience in these initiatives/programs?
10. How regularly is this professional development related to diversity provided?
11. Have you had to learn new methods or gain new knowledge to accommodate diversity in your classroom? If so, what sources did you use to learn new methods or gain knowledge?
12. Research show that diversity dialog can cause a wide array of emotional responses in the classroom. How do you feel when discussing diversity issues in the classroom, particularly when considering students whose background may be vastly different than your own? Are there any specific habits or strategies you employ when you anticipate a dialog related to diversity issues that may cause emotional reactions among students?
13. In what ways has diversity in the classroom positively impacted your teaching and student learning?
14. In what ways has diversity in the classroom negatively impacted your teaching and student learning?
15. As a White faculty member, what do you feel your role is in your institution as it relates to diversity? How about in your classroom?

**White Faculty Perceptions of Diversity: A Community College Perspective  
Interview #2 (Final Interview) Protocol**

1. How would you describe your culture?
2. Are there any customs, norms or traditions you feel have played a role in helping you form your identity? Can you give me a specific example?
3. How do you think others would describe your culture, customs or traditions?
4. According to literature, rural communities tend to be more homogeneous in makeup. How does being in a rural environment impact your sense of identity?
5. Do you feel race is a significant factor in your identity? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel race plays a role in your students' identity? Why or why not?
7. Current literature defines white privilege as unearned advantages or benefits afford to Whites within a system of racial oppression. It is also noted that often these privileges go unnoticed by Whites. How do you feel when you hear the term "white privilege"? Have you observed white privilege? If so, please provide a specific example.
8. Literature defines the achievement gap as the average academic achievement difference among students across socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic groups. What is your familiarity with the achievement gap? What do you attribute to the growing achievement gap?
9. Do you feel responsible for attending to the achievement gap? Why or why not? How does your understanding of the achievement gap affect your teaching or assessment strategies?
10. Is equity in educational settings possible? Why or why not? What are the barriers or challenges to achieving equity and impacting the achievement gap?
11. According to research, rural community colleges often serve as the primary institutions in rural communities that provide cultural amenities. How do you learn more about other races, cultures or diversity? What resources exist in your rural community to support your learning?
12. Do you have sources outside of the college to help inform your understanding of other cultures or diversity? If so, what are these sources and how frequently do you engage in activities to learn about individuals or groups whose backgrounds may be different than your own?
13. According to research, race is more salient for people of color/minorities. Base on your experience, in your opinion does race really matter? Why do you feel that way?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to share related to your experience with race and/or diversity that you feel would be important to understanding white faculty members' perceptions of diversity?